Treated Like A Professional: A Case Study in Adjunct Faculty Socialization

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ABSTRACT

TREATED LIKE A PROFESSIONAL: A CASE STUDY IN
ADJUNCT FACULTY SOCIALIZATION

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This study explored the experiences of part-time adjunct faculty members in a community college setting. It specifically looked at how adjuncts described: (1) their career journey to being adult educators, (2) their socialization experience, and (3) how teaching adult education influenced their perspective on teaching. All participants were experienced adjunct instructors in an adult basic and secondary education department (ABE/ASE) at a suburban community college. By looking at experienced adjunct instructors, the study informs practices to support both experienced and new part-time college faculty members.

A qualitative case study approach was used to explore the participants’ experiences. Ten adjunct faculty members who had been teaching for two years or more in the ABE/ASE department were interviewed. Participant artifacts added to the data collection and were explored using photo elicitation. The study was framed by Lawson’s 1983 model of socialization, specifically organizational socialization, which happens when individuals enter the workforce and are introduced to their organization’s communally held norms, attitudes, beliefs, and social knowledge—known as “learning the ropes” of the organization.

Contrary to many studies on adjunct college faculty, participants described mostly positive experiences. Findings indicated that participants found adult education teaching positions accidentally while seeking part-time teaching positions in related disciplines at the
community college, participants’ socialization experience was most influenced by students and colleagues, and participants felt well respected by the college administration. These findings can be used to assist in the integration of adjunct faculty into the college setting and inform practices that influence their retention.

*Keywords:* Adjunct faculty, teacher, community college, socialization, adult basic and secondary education, case study
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DEDICATION

To my parents who instilled the value of education,
my siblings who modeled it,
and my husband and children who continue the passion for learning.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

People are learning all the time, no one is not learning.
(Rogers, 2002, p. 118)

For the first time in 2001, the number of General Educational Development (GED) test takers was over one million (GED, 2014; Tyler, 2005). The GED is the primary route to a secondary credential for individuals looking for another chance at a secondary education. Individuals in need of a high school equivalency certificate may have left high school before graduating, they might have come to the United States (U.S.) without secondary schooling, or they may have had secondary or higher education in their home country but found the foreign credentials to be unacceptable to U.S. employers or were unable to have the credentials verified (Clark & Jaeger, 2006). Many of these learners need preparation to be equipped to pass the high school equivalency exam, so they come to adult education programs looking for that instruction. Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2005) argued that adult learning had not been the focus of study until recently; however, influential teachers of the past, including Aristotle, Socrates, and Plato considered “learning to be a process of mental inquiry, not passive reception of transmitted content” and therefore used methods that engaged their students in inquiry (p. 35).

Deliberate attention to adult education started with the Carnegie Corporation of New York making significant funding available for research and publications, including support for the founding of the American Association for Adult Education in 1926 (Knowles et al., 2005; Stubblefield & Keane, 1989). University extension programs began growing around this time, as
did the idea of vocational education (Stubblefield & Keane, 1989; Thompson, 2008). The YMCA also played a large role. Libraries and reading rooms had already been offered by the YMCA, but during this time the YMCA changed its focus from classes offering elementary school subjects to classes with a vocational and technical training focus (Thompson, 2008).

The roots of adult education can be traced back as far as the 1600s during the Colonial Period, but the first adult education act was signed into law as part of President Johnson’s War on Poverty (Rose, 1991; Sticht, 2002; Tyler, 2005). Under Title II of the Economic Opportunity Act (EOA) of 1964, funding was provided for adult education programs to deliver instruction to those having challenges finding or keeping employment because of low literacy skills (Rose, 1991; Sticht, 2002; Tyler, 2005). With the passage of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998 as Title II: The Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, connections were developed between adult education and workforce development.

In 2014, President Obama signed the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) to develop an even tighter bond between education and workforce development. This act made the alignment among adult education, postsecondary education, and employers stronger by identifying the achievement of gaining the skills and knowledge necessary for success in postsecondary education and the workforce as the core purpose of adult education (State Community College Board [SCCB], 2017). Under WIOA, adult education programs are mandated to work closer with workforce partners, and all of the partners are held accountable for learner or client outcomes. At the time of this writing, many of the details regarding how this will happen in practice are still being developed. While progress has been made in adult education, many opportunities still exist for research to advance the field.
Introduction to the Study

This study took place in a Midwestern state, where community colleges account for 47.5% of adult education programs (SCCB, 2016). At 30%, the next largest program base in the state is in Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), followed by K-12 public school districts and Regional Offices of Education with a combined total of 20% of adult education programs (SCCB, 2016). Specifically, this study took place in a suburban community college setting.

When one thinks of a professional in most settings and occupations, including a community college, a full-time employee is typically who comes to mind (Sabatini et al., 2000). However, the majority of faculty at many community colleges are part-time teachers (Ott & Dippold, 2018). Just as adjunct faculty rates are high in colleges overall, many adult educators teach part-time. In the adult education teaching environment, only a small number of opportunities are available for full-time teaching, leading adult education to be a field dominated by part-time teachers (Sabatini et al., 2000; Smith & Gomez, 2011), often referred to as adjunct faculty members in the college environment. Some studies have shown part-time faculty are less engaged in their institution (Rossol-Allison & Beyers, 2011), including minimal participation in administrative activities, professional development, and peer relationships when compared to full-time faculty (Schuetz, 2002). On the other hand, some teachers who specifically wanted part-time employment showed high levels of engagement at their institutions (Feldman & Turnley, 2004) and felt fulfilled by their part-time status as long as their job performance was recognized (Ott & Dippold, 2018). When considering the quality of instruction provided by part-time and full-time faculty, Jolley, Cross, and Bryant (2014) concluded no significant difference existed.
Most teachers who end up teaching in adult education initially planned for careers in primary and secondary education (Sabatini et al., 2000; Smith & Hofer, 2003). Even though they end up as teachers in adult education via a path to somewhere else, once they begin teaching, many choose to stay. In fact, 88% of the respondents in a study of adult education teachers said they made the right choice in becoming an adult education instructor (Sabatini et al., 2000). To respond to the needs of their students and the expectations of the program, it is essential for teachers to have the capacity to adapt to their teaching environment (Uzum, 2013).

Problem Statement

Most teachers in adult education programs have not been trained as instructors of adults but rather were trained as educators of children (Sabatini et al., 2000). Historically, these instructors originated as teachers in K-12 systems, choosing to volunteer or work in evening programs for adults sponsored by their daytime employers (Sticht, 2002). Those coming from other fields outside of education usually have had experiences such as volunteering (Sabatini et al., 2000) that piqued their interest in teaching in the field. So the vast majority of instructors discover teaching adult education through a circuitous path and engage in further targeted education or professional development after they are hired (Smith & Gomez, 2011; Smith & Hofer, 2003).

U.S. institutions of higher education have few, if any, bachelor-degree programs in adult education and only a small number of programs offering master’s degrees or graduate certificates in the field (Smith & Gomez, 2011), meaning adult education teachers have minimal formal preparation specific to teaching adults (Smith & Hofer, 2003). Often a bachelor’s degree and the desire to help learners find success have been enough to get hired in this little-known field.
Unlike K-12 systems, adult education does not have a commonly recognized certification or credential promising a completer has a particular set of practices (Perin, 1999; Smith & Gomez, 2011).

In some states the minimum qualifications for teaching in an adult education program are a bachelor’s degree combined with annual adult education-related professional development (Smith & Gomez, 2011; SCCB, 2017). Individual programs, however, may have additional qualifications for teaching (Smith & Gomez, 2011). For example, to be hired for the program in which this study took place, teachers are required to have at least a bachelor’s degree in education or a related field and at least one year’s teaching experience in an area related to the field in which they will be teaching. While the requirement is a bachelor’s degree, a large number of instructors teaching adult education at this institution hold master’s degrees and gained their relevant teaching experience through the K-12 system. Because most teachers in adult basic and secondary education were formally trained to teach learners in the K-12 system (Sabatini et al., 2000), the translation of that training to a different context (Hornak, Ozaki, & Lunceford, 2016) and what experiences teachers have had on their journey as adult education teachers are meaningful. It is relevant to know what the teachers brought to the situation, what supports they received, what they discovered they needed, and where they were on their journey.

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative case study explored the experiences of adjunct faculty teaching Adult Basic and Secondary Education (ABE/ASE) classes in an adult education setting in a Midwestern community college. The study allowed the teachers to describe their experience socializing into this setting while responding to student needs (Uzum, 2013) and program
expectations. In addressing this concept through the lens of socialization, one can acknowledge it as a dialectic process and recognize how teachers influence their setting at the same time the setting is shaping them (Lawson, 1983a; Zeichner & Gore, 1989). The purpose of this study was to fill a gap in the literature through an exploration of the descriptions of experienced adult education teachers’ socialization experiences and processes.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this qualitative case study:

1. How do teachers describe their career journey to being adult educators?
2. How do teachers describe their socialization into adult education?
3. How do teachers describe how teaching adult education has influenced their perspective on teaching?

Significance of the Study

The teacher socialization process (i.e., recruiting, teacher education, and educational practices) is heavily influenced by teachers who stay in the field a long time (Lawson, 1983a). The results of the study could inform work practices that support committed and experienced teachers and practices helpful to new teachers as well (Macdonald, 1999; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). More specifically, “understanding the experiences and socialization of teachers who have sustained a long career could prove beneficial in helping other teachers navigate the difficulties of teaching. . . . as well as in attracting or retaining other teachers” (Pike & Fletcher, 2014, p. 13).

Socialization is a lifelong practice, with research primarily found on the socialization of pre-service teachers but lacking on the socialization experiences of practicing teachers (Lawson,
Research focused on experienced teachers beyond their first year is needed (Pike & Fletcher, 2014; Staton & Hunt, 1992). Combined with the dearth of research on the socialization of experienced teachers, this study also addresses the critical goal for institutions of higher education of “integrating adjunct faculty into the culture of the learning organization” (Wyles, 1998, p. 92). Lastly, the study contributes to the literature on adult education, which is scarce (Sabatini et al., 2000; Smith & Gomez, 2011) and largely unscientific (Sabatini et al., 2000).

Definition of Adult Education

The term adult education has many meanings and contexts. For this study it was defined as an umbrella term that includes English as a Second Language (ESL), Adult Basic Education (ABE), and Adult Secondary Education (ASE) instructional programs (Merriam & Brockett, 2007). These instructional programs are free or very low cost to learners and offer formal and structured educational settings (SCCB, 2018). Federal and state grants cover a portion of the program costs and require accountability using the National Reporting System (SCCB, 2018). Community colleges, public schools, literacy organizations, community-based organizations (CBO), libraries, and correctional institutions are the typical sites in which classes take place.

Programs for learners whose literacy or numeracy skills are at less than a ninth-grade level equivalent are referred to as adult basic education, while programs for those learners with language arts and math skills of ninth-grade level equivalent and higher are referred to as adult secondary education (Merriam & Brockett, 2007; SCCB, 2009). According to Merriam and Brockett (2007), ESL programs are for nonnative speakers of English. Currently learners as
young as 16 can be served by adult education programs (SCCB, 2018). This study focused on teachers instructing learners in ABE and ASE programs only.

Conceptual Framework

Work organizations influence their members from the time they enter the work setting and continue to do so as long as they remain in the workplace (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). This influence, or organizational socialization, is the process by which an individual learns the social knowledge, beliefs, perspectives, norms, and skills associated with membership in the organization, sometimes referred to as learning “the ropes” (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979, p. 3). In the case of teachers, it is transforming their knowledge, beliefs, and behaviors into classroom practice (Retallick, 1993). The socialization process is highly contextualized as well as ongoing and long-lasting (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). For teachers, this socialization informally begins as soon as an individual starts thinking about becoming a teacher (Lawson, 1983b), has its formal beginning in teacher preparation education, and “continues throughout the career as teachers adjust, adapt, and change in their perspectives, roles, and environments” (Staton & Hunt, 1992, p. 109). Hence, the socialization of teachers is a lifelong process (Lawson, 1983a).

Summary

Five chapters make up this document. This first chapter served as an introduction and included the problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study, and conceptual framework. The next chapter reviews literature related to adult education, community colleges, adjunct instructors, informal learning, and organizational socialization. Chapter 3 addresses the methodology, including the research design, participants, and data
analysis. Chapter 4 details the findings from the participant interviews. Chapter 5 provides a discussion, including implications and recommendations.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter starts by providing a history of adult learning and then a background on adult education programs, including a framework of service providers, program planning, instructional delivery, funding, measures of performance, and background information on community colleges, adjunct instructors, and adult learners who seek adult education programs. Next is the relevant literature on teachers as learners, characteristics of effective teachers, and informal learning. Finally, organizational socialization is presented.

History of Adult Learning

A growing awareness that adults had an underestimated potential for continued learning (Knowles, 1973) led to new studies and two streams of inquiry: the scientific stream and the artistic stream (Knowles et al., 2005). These two approaches to adult learning had different foci and were initiated by publications from researchers well known in their fields, with one of them providing the scientific foundation for adult learning and the other serving as the framework for adult education (Knowles et al., 2005).

With the publication of Adult Learning (Thorndike, 1928), the scientific stream of inquiry for adult learning was started. To learn more about the learning ability of adults, Thorndike (1928) investigated the adult rate of learning over time using a cross-sectional approach. This type of approach compared the learning ability for groups of individuals in sequential age groups. The results of his study indicated that learning peaks at age 22 and then begins falling in
small increments (Knowles, 1973). However, shortly after Thorndike’s (1928) work, longitudinal studies were conducted that yielded different results. In the longitudinal studies, the same test was taken by individuals at multiple points across their lifetime. In each of these examples, the participants performed better on the test when they took it later in life than when they took it earlier, leading to the conclusion that adults could learn (Knowles, 1973). While these results appear to contradict each other, they led to further studies on the speed of response for adults versus the quality of the response. The studies done on participant response indicated that while the speed of response did slow as adults aged, the quality of the response did not (Knowles, 1973). Additionally, Thorndike’s (1928) use of the cross-sectional approach led to questions regarding whether his results actually illustrated a decline in formal schooling as adults aged rather than an inability to learn (Knowles, 1973). In combination, these studies began a scientific foundation for the field of adult learning (Knowles et al., 2005).

The other stream of inquiry, the artistic or intuitive stream, started with the publication of *The Meaning of Adult Education* (Lindeman, 1926). This was significant because Lindeman (1926) believed that adults’ experiences, rather than the academic subject matter, should be the focus for adult education. He did not believe that academics should be neglected but instead tackled as necessary when adults identified what real-life problems they needed to solve (Knowles et al., 2005). For Lindeman (1926), the understanding and interpretation of an adult’s own experiences was a significant part of the educational process (Thompson, 2008). This belief provided the structure for andragogy, a framework for adult learning (Knowles et al., 2005). As opposed to comparing adult learning to how children learn, Lindeman’s (1926) assumptions compared adult learning to traditional education because he saw the possibility that children could also benefit from these assumptions (Knowles et al., 2005). The following were
Lindeman’s (1926) assumptions as summarized by Knowles et al. (2005): (a) adults are motivated to learn as they experience needs and interests that learning will satisfy; (b) adults’ orientation to learning is life-centered; (c) experience is the richest source for adults’ learning; (d) adults have a deep need to be self-directing; and (e) individual differences among people increase with age (p. 40).

Using what had been learned through experience and research to formulate a theory or set of assumptions specific to adult learners had been attempted for more than five decades, but it was not until the 1960s that the term andragogy was popularized by Malcolm Knowles (Knowles et al., 2005).

Adult Education Programs

Adult education programs provide services to a wide range of learners seeking to improve their literacy skills (Taylor, 1989), prepare for high school equivalency exams (Martin & Fisher, 1989), and ultimately get ready for college and the workforce (SCCB, 2009). As for learners seeking literacy instruction, close to half of the adults in the United States who are lacking in literacy skills struggle to comprehend basic numeracy operations, use critical thinking skills, or have the ability to proficiently fill out a job application (Styles, 2011). Furthermore, learners in need of a high school equivalency are unlikely to have the skills and qualifications needed to compete in society and the workforce, so programs providing literacy instruction and high school equivalency preparation play a critical social and economic role (Styles, 2011).

Framework of Service Providers

Adult education takes place in numerous settings, with a variety of curricula and varied teaching methods that seek to provide services to diverse groups of learners (Taylor, 1989). To
organize these programs, a framework of adult education providers developed by Apps (1989) is still relevant today. He suggested four broad categories of adult education service providers: tax supported, nonprofit, for-profit, and nonorganized. The first category of providers are those agencies or institutions that receive some level of tax support. This category includes K-12 public schools, community colleges, universities, correctional institutions, and libraries. Apps’s (1989) next category is nonprofit service providers like the YMCA, YWCA, and other community-based organizations. The third category suggested by Apps (1989) is for-profit providers, including proprietary and private schools, and the final category of service providers of adult education is nonorganized learning opportunities. Informal online learning is an example of a nonorganized provider. Adult education is not the principal mission for most of these organizations, so while they do provide adult education, for some it is not very connected to the institution (Merriam & Brockett, 2007).

**Structure and Offerings**

A large part of the adult education practice centers on program planning (Merriam & Brockett, 2007). Since adult education programs are striving to provide “services that assist adults in improving their skills, achieving their educational goals, and transitioning to further education or employment” (SCCB, 2009, p. 5), this is reflected in their programming. Services may be delivered in a variety of ways. Courses for learners functioning below a ninth-grade level in reading, writing, mathematics, and workforce readiness are referred to as Adult Basic Education (ABE) courses (Merriam & Brockett, 2007; SCCB, 2009). Courses for learners functioning at a ninth-grade level or higher or preparing for a high school equivalency exam, postsecondary education, and employment are referred to as Adult Secondary Education (ASE)
courses (SCCB, 2009). Bridge courses that combine basic academic skills and occupational learning as well as Integrated Education and Training (IET) programs that combine basic academic skills and occupational learning (SCCB, 2009) are also offered in many adult education settings. Although not a focus of this study, English as a Second Language courses are those intended for learners to improve their proficiency in English (SCCB, 2009).

The course content and academic levels offered depend primarily on demographics and funding. Larger service providers may have enough learners with differing needs to offer a wider variety of courses. A community college with a large enrollment, for example, may offer a separate course in ABE for math and a separate course for language arts (reading and writing) as well as separate courses in ASE for both math and language arts and perhaps multiple courses within these levels. In contrast, a smaller program may have learners with diverse needs learning simultaneously in the same classroom or, if the group has similar learning needs, the program may offer courses with a narrower focus on a particular content area or academic level, and as learners progress beyond that focus, they may transition to the community college or other program that offers the next level of instruction.

Different programs also have different structures for enrollment. The three types of enrollment structures are fixed, managed, and open enrollment (Scogins, Thompson, & Reabe, 2008). In a fixed enrollment setting, learners may enter the program only on the first few days at the start of a semester. In managed enrollment, multiple, strategic entry points open up throughout a semester for learner entry, and in open enrollment, learners may enter a program at any time. While all three structures are still used by various programs today, these enrollment structures have evolved from a time prior to the passage of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) when the goal of adult education programs was to be as flexible as possible in an effort to cater
to learners who had challenges maintaining regular attendance as opposed to the current adult education environment focused on the production of defined and measurable learner outcomes (Scogins et al., 2008).

The enrollment structure can impact the curriculum. One benefit of fixed enrollment is the ability it gives teachers and learners to focus on curriculum. With fixed enrollment, instructional concepts can be built on as the session progresses (Scogins et al., 2008). Effective curriculum is driven by content standards and is a meaningful part of any educational experience. As part of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) guidelines, states and therefore programs are asked to align adult education content standards to the standards adopted by the state (SCCB, 2017).

**Instructional Delivery**

The development and delivery of programming includes “making decisions about what to offer, how to offer it, and how to evaluate it” (Merriam & Brockett, 2007, p. 120). When looking at what to offer, the content typically reflects the aim of adult education (Merriam & Brockett, 2007), so it includes the skills and strategies needed for career and technical education as well as postsecondary education (SCCB, 2009). Selecting from a variety of formats, program administrators choose those that best meet the needs of their learners and communities (Taylor, 1989). The adult education program in which the current study took place offers classes in two formats: face-to-face and online. However, only one online instructional option for distance education was approved by the state for use in adult education programs at the time of the study (SCCB, 2018).
Funding

In addition to enrollment characteristics, funding plays a significant role in course offerings. The number and type of classes offered, class size, class duration, and staff professional development opportunities all have a direct connection to the sources and amount of funding available to the program (Beder & Medina, 2001). Some organizations depend entirely on federal and state grants, while others have a host organization that also provides funds to the program. Additionally, funding sources always have guidelines on how money can be spent, but some funders have very specific regulations or eligibility requirements dictating fund use for particular purposes, populations, and content areas (Beder & Medina, 2001; SCCB, 2018). To continue receiving money, funders want to see how a service provider meets or exceeds performance targets over the course of the year (SCCB, 2018).

Assessment

Nationally, multiple measures of performance are used to evaluate the effectiveness of an adult education provider, with six core follow-up measures of performance related to learner transition to postsecondary education and employment as well as measurable skill gain performance targets for levels of educational functioning (SCCB, 2018). Educational functioning performance is measured by learner skill level gains on an approved standardized test. Using the National Reporting System (NRS), learner participation and outcomes are monitored (SCCB, 2018).
Community College Role in Adult Education

Community colleges were established in the United States beginning in the early 1900s (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014). Joliet Junior College in Illinois is believed to be the oldest community college in the country, established in the first years of the 20th century (Shearon & Tollefson, 1989). Over time and across states, the priorities, missions, and roles of community colleges have evolved (Shearon & Tollefson, 1989). Originally community colleges, also referred to as junior colleges and technical colleges, began as extensions of secondary schools to fill a gap between secondary school and the four-year university (Shearon & Tollefson, 1989). It was suggested by some university presidents and trustees at the time that having educational institutions whose goal was to provide vocational courses and the general education courses typically provided in the freshman and sophomore years of university study was a way to allow universities to better pursue being true research institutions and provide higher order academics (Cohen et al., 2014). Community colleges were viewed as settings to teach “practical, applied, and basic subjects, and they advanced the idea of egalitarianism for all people” (Shearon & Tollefson, 1989, p. 317).

Today’s community colleges have foci on academic transfer, developmental education, occupational education, community services and continuing education (Cohen et al., 2014; Shearon & Tollefson, 1989). Due to community colleges’ experience and resources, they are well positioned to offer adult education services (Grede & Friedlander, 1981; Office of Vocational and Adult Education [OVAE], 1988). Community colleges have been significant in the promotion of adult literacy within the communities they serve (Williams & Colby, 1991). Community colleges are also well suited to provide adult education services due to their
connection to national initiatives (Bailey, 2009) and the additional educational benefits reaped by their program completers (OVAE, 1988).

**Resources and Facilities**

Community colleges have resources and facilities that promote student success (Cohen et al., 2014). Many of these services can be accessed by adult education learners on campus. For example, workforce development services are available to provide training, retraining, and employability skills development (Iowa Association of Adult and Continuing Education Deans and Directors, 1996). To encourage learner persistence, community colleges offer wraparound services like advising, tutoring, and other support services (Bragg & Barnett, 2009). A particular support service for those needing learning accommodations is the availability of services through the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Office on campus (Williams & Colby, 1991). Additionally, community colleges offer a variety of instructional technologies, including the use of computers (OVAE, 1988) and online educational opportunities.

Systems that impact teacher effectiveness are also part of the resource benefit of community college affiliation with adult education, including teacher evaluations (OVAE, 1988) and opportunities for professional development (Laanan & Cox, 2006). Lastly, in addition to the federal and state grants the programs receive (OVAE, 1988), community colleges are often able to provide funding to adult education programs.

**Initiatives and Partnerships**

National organizations look to partner with community colleges on initiatives, and even if adult education is not the target, adult education learners often benefit as community colleges integrate the initiatives into their offerings. One such initiative, Achieving the Dream (ATD),
focuses on the success of community college students, particularly those facing barriers (Bailey, 2009). Data driven decision making is a hallmark of ATD (Bailey, 2009) and has encouraged the use of paired course models for students in developmental education and for underprepared students taking gatekeeper courses that can also increase success for adult education learners.

**Additional Benefits**

Adult education learners gain additional educational benefits when they complete their adult education at a community college (OVAE, 1988). Adult education learners are able to enjoy the benefits a college campus offers and are able to share that experience with their peers. Additionally, many community colleges offer concurrent enrollment to adult education learners, decreasing the need for a transition to traditional college courses (OVAE, 1988). These concurrent course options take various forms including integrated education and training (IET) models for career and technology education and learning communities for transfer courses. Also, community colleges usually offer recipients of a high school equivalency credential the ability to celebrate their accomplishment with family and friends in a formal graduation ceremony (OVAE 1988).

**Adjunct Instructors**

The percent of teaching done by adjunct instructors continues to increase, leaving higher education structurally dependent on the services of part-time teachers (Wyles, 1998). At community colleges, full-time faculty retirements and increasing demands coupled with decreasing resources have led to large numbers of adjunct faculty being hired, with few of these part-time positions leading to full-time employment (Wyles, 1998). At many community colleges, the majority of faculty are part-time teachers (Leslie & Gappa, 2002; Ott & Dippold,
This trend to hire more adjunct instructors (Gazza & Shellenbarger, 2010) replicates the national economy in which approximately one third of workers are contingent, and part-time faculty are hired for about 75% of higher education teaching positions (Wyles, 1998). Even though it has been shown that adjunct faculty are as committed (Feldman & Turnley, 2004; Ott & Dippold, 2018; Wyles, 1998), effective (Jolley et al., 2014; Wyles, 1998) and as credentialed as full-time faculty, part-time faculty are marginalized at most institutions of higher education (Wyles, 1998).

When looking at job satisfaction and engagement in the work environment, part-time faculty have been found to be less engaged in their institution (Rossol-Allison & Beyers, 2011), this includes lack of participation in administrative activities, professional development, and peer relationships in comparison to full-time faculty (Schuetz, 2002). Conversely, when part-time employment was specifically desired, adjunct instructors showed high levels of engagement at their institutions (Feldman & Turnley, 2004), and as long as their job performance was recognized, they felt fulfilled by their part-time status (Ott & Dippold, 2018). While true that some adjunct faculty were temporary and dissatisfied and stitching together part-time teaching jobs at multiple institutions, a larger portion were employed full-time elsewhere or were not seeking full-time teaching work in the college environment (Leslie & Gappa, 2002).

Data from a national survey showed more than half of the part-time faculty at community colleges held master’s degrees and just under 10% were working toward a doctorate (Leslie & Gappa, 2002). Smith and Hofer’s (2003) study with adult education teachers indicated 49% of teachers held degrees beyond the bachelor’s degree.

Studies have also addressed the quality of instruction of adjunct faculty members (Jolley et al., 2014; Wyles, 1998). Jolley et al. (2014) concluded there was no significant difference. At
her institution, Wyles (1998) found the student outcomes produced by the adjunct faculty were on par with the outcomes of full-time faculty and student evaluations of adjunct instructors indicated effectiveness similar to full-time faculty. Noting the importance of part-time faculty, Wyles recommended “integrating adjunct faculty into the culture of the learning organization” as a critical goal for institutions of higher education (1998, p. 92).

Demographically, part-time faculty are equally men and women (Leslie & Gappa, 2002). Part-time faculty tend to be both older and younger than full-time faculty (Leslie & Gappa, 2002). Adjuncts had taught for an average of five to six years, with over half having taught five or more years at the institution at which they currently work (Leslie & Gappa, 2002). Overall, Leslie and Gappa found “part-time faculty in community colleges to be stable professionals with substantial experience and commitment to their work” (2002, p. 62).

Looking specifically at adult education, only a small number of opportunities were available for full-time teaching, leading adult education to be a field dominated by part-time teachers (Sabatini et al., 2000; Smith & Gomez, 2011). In their survey of adult basic education teachers, Smith and Hofer (2003) found 18% of participants listed wanting to work in a part-time teaching job as their reason for becoming an adult education teacher. The other reason some selected was the desire to work with adults as opposed to children, with 19% of teachers making that selection (Smith & Hofer, 2003). Since few teachers intentionally selected a career in adult education, the researchers speculated working with adults was actually the reason these teachers stayed in the field as opposed to why they began working in the field initially (Smith & Hofer, 2003). Adult education instructors spent an average of five years or less teaching (Sabatini et al., 2000) in comparison to the average five or six years of teaching for adjuncts overall (Leslie & Gappa, 2002). Additionally, many adult education teachers shared that they were unaware of the
field until they began teaching in it and “a significant portion did not stay in the field for long” (Smith & Hofer, 2003, p. 19). However, those who stayed realized they had an attraction for teaching adults (Smith & Hofer, 2003).

Characteristics of Effective Teachers

Are there qualities or behaviors teachers can possess that make their classrooms places in which learning is more likely to take place? The following section looks at various studies focusing on what qualities enhance a teacher’s effectiveness since effective teachers make the difference in the academic and personal lives of their students (Ruddell, 1995).

Teacher Effectiveness

Literature from several educational areas contributes to the way effective teaching is understood. In his study, Ruddell (1995) illustrated how personal characteristics, an understanding of teaching and learning, content knowledge, and style of interaction and role surfaced as shared beliefs of influential teachers. In considering effectiveness, Korthagen (2004) added factors outside of a teachers’ control such as the learners, class, and school to the discussion. Darling-Hammond and Youngs (2002) noted the two most determining characteristics for teacher effectiveness were professional knowledge of teaching and learning and content knowledge. Hamachek (1969, 1999) added to the conversation on teacher effectiveness by including the concept of self and its significance. Other relevant considerations were learner data, including feedback, assessment, and grading, as noted by Ambrose, Bridges, DiPietro, Lovett, and Norman (2010) and Fink (2013). Rossetti’s (2002) study viewed teachers as learners as part of teacher effectiveness.
To identify characteristics of an effective teacher, Ruddell (1995) interviewed a variety of students about teachers who had a positive influence on their personal and academic lives. Based on the interviews, Ruddell (1995) categorized the following characteristics of influential teachers. Influential teachers use well-articulated strategies and concepts of instruction. Influential teachers focus on how learners are internally motivated as opposed to using external learner motivators. Ruddell (1995) also found that influential teachers asked higher order questions as a way to challenge and motivate learners.

The teachers in Ruddell’s (1995) research believed that effective teachers had certain qualities. He listed five themes that evolved from the beliefs of the influential teachers. The first was that effective teachers had particular personal characteristics: energy, commitment, and passion; were warm and caring; were flexible; and had high expectations of self. The second included a teacher’s understanding of learners’ potential. This theme revolved around the teacher being sensitive to individual needs, motivations, and aptitudes; understanding where learners were developmentally; and placing high demands on learners. The teachers’ attitude toward the subject was the third theme that developed from Ruddell’s (1995) research. This theme included the teacher having enthusiasm, creating intellectual excitement, and considering alternative points of view toward the subject.

The fourth theme Ruddell (1995) referred to as life adjustment. This encompassed a teacher’s ability to show concern with learners as persons and to be attentive to both their academic and personal problems. The quality of instruction facilitated by the teacher was the last theme. This theme included the ability to make the material personally relevant to the learner and to stress the importance of basic communication—in other words, clear writing, comprehension of text, and critical thinking. It also included the ability to develop logical and strategy-oriented
instruction: (a) clear statement of problems, (b) use of familiar concrete examples, (c) extension to more abstract examples, (d) analysis of abstract concepts involved, and (e) application of concepts to new contexts. Teachers assisting learners in identifying issues that should be considered before conclusions are reached is encompassed in this theme, as is engaging learners in the process of intellectual discovery.

It is relevant to note that influential teachers may not be effective with every learner, nor are all effective teachers necessarily warm and enthusiastic (Hamachek, 1999). These conclusions cannot be reached because many other factors impact the influence, or effect, a teacher has in the classroom. In addition to the teacher’s personal qualities, the learners’ needs and personalities and the teacher’s other competencies play a role (Hamachek, 1999; Korthagen, 2004).

Korthagen’s (2004) research regarding K-12 teacher education suggested the essential qualities of an effective teacher may be context specific, making it difficult to develop a precise description of a good teacher. He addressed the dichotomy between the “competency-based view of teachers and an emphasis on the teacher’s self” (p. 79), suggesting that more factors influence the effectiveness of a teacher. Tickle (1999) concluded that teacher competencies and the related outcomes are often the target of policy makers, while teachers’ personal characteristics are more generally addressed by researchers. Korthagen (2004) believed the involvement of more than two broad categories was needed when addressing influential or effective teaching. He used the illustration of peeling back an onion, with each layer representing a different concept related to effective teaching. With this in mind, Korthagen (2004) developed a model of concepts that influence a teacher’s effectiveness using outside and inside levels as a way to organize the ideas. The three outside levels that influence teacher effectiveness are the environment, including the
learners, class, and school; the teacher’s behavior; and the teacher’s competencies, such as knowledge, skills, and attitude. The inside levels in this model are teacher beliefs, identity or role of the teacher, and the teacher’s mission or personal calling (p. 80).

Korthagen (2004) concluded that no list could adequately detail the competencies needed to be an effective teacher; instead, his framework suggested these aspects should be considered in varying degrees. Ambrose et al. (2010) agreed with Korthagen (2004) that teaching is a complex and contextualized activity that required constant adaptation. This need for adaptation is due to the changing needs of learners in class, the curriculum, and the fluidity of technology. To be an effective teacher, Ambrose et al. (2010) believed there were recurring themes needing mastery. These themes addressed developmental, cognitive, and motivational goals in combination with “collecting data about students, modeling expert practice, scaffolding complex tasks, and being explicit about objectives and expectations” (p. 217).

Evidence shows that experience, verbal ability, content knowledge, and knowledge about teaching and learning gained from teacher preparation contribute to teacher effectiveness (Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002). Reviewing research on this topic using quantitative federal K-12 education data sets, Darling-Hammond and Youngs document “relationships between teacher qualifications and student achievement across studies” (2002, p. 14). In particular, numerous studies showed that content knowledge measured by majors, minors, or degrees combined with professional knowledge of teaching and learning measured by teacher preparation or certification requirements positively influenced learner outcomes (Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002).

Hamachek’s (1969, 1999) research is an example of how research on effective teachers has changed over the years. In his 1999 article, Hamachek discussed the behaviors and personal
qualities identified in influential teachers. A teacher was labeled as an effective or influential teacher because “that person is engaging in observable and specifiable behaviors that set him or her a cut above others” (pp. 191-192). In his 1969 article, he concluded that four characteristics could be attributed to good teachers. The first of these was personal characteristics. Effective teachers tended to have a sense of humor, related well to learners, were flexible, and were reasonable. Next were the instructional procedures and interaction styles of these teachers. Effective teachers tended to use a variety of methods ranging from teacher-centered methods to learner-centered methods depending on the context and had command of their subject matter. They also were more inclined to see things from the learners’ viewpoint, personalize their teaching, and be skilled at asking questions of their students. The last two characteristics were related to a teacher’s perceptions of self and others. Effective teachers tended to see themselves as self-confident and cheerful. Lastly, effective teachers tended to have optimistic views of learners and fellow teachers, were more inclined to see things from the viewpoint of others, and saw the democratic classroom positively.

In comparison to his 1969 article, Hamachek (1999) believed there was no one particular behavior or characteristic that made an effective teacher and suggested four dimensions or patterns shared by influential teachers. The four dimensions were personal characteristics, instructional procedures and interaction styles, teacher’s perception of self, and teacher’s perception of others. They were similar to those proposed in 1969, but not exactly the same. Personal characteristics as a dimension was represented similarly in both articles. These qualities related to warmth, humor, and flexibility in the classroom. Hamachek (1999) posited that how we communicate is indicative of “what we know” but also “who we are” to our students (p. 192). Intellectual characteristics of effective teachers as a characteristic was included in the dimension
relating to instruction and interaction in the previous article. The increasing emphasis on teacher preparation and accountability during this decade (Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002) may have led the author to separate content knowledge, increased accountability for student learning outcomes, and improved teacher preparation into its own dimension in the later article.

Interaction styles and instructional methods of effective teachers were comparable qualities in Hamachek’s (1969, 1999) articles, with the exception of breaking out intellectual characteristics in the later article. These dimensions or patterns indicated that effective teachers were more likely to provide personalized feedback, have positive rapport with learners, be flexible, and move at a pace that allowed learning to take place. Additionally, direct and explicit instruction was mentioned as an effective instructional method, as were indirect methods, suggesting that each had a place in the classroom of an influential teacher (Hamachek 1969, 1999). Hamachek (1999) alternated between tackling these as one combined dimension or two separate dimensions, as he addressed similar teacher characteristics.

The final quality of an effective teacher to be addressed by Hamachek (1999) was that of self. In the earlier article it was addressed as two dimensions, whereas in this review it was addressed outside of the dimensions but in great length. He suggested that in addition to taking care that their instruction and content were meaningful, influential teachers took time to self-evaluate and reflect, noting that being aware of ourselves and the perception others had of us was also important to being an effective teacher. Hamachek (1999) concluded that “consciously, we teach what we know; unconsciously, we teach who we are” (p. 209).

The majority of the research looked at so far has been in K-12 settings. Hamachek’s 1999 text on K-12 teachers also included college teachers. Fink (2013) developed a list that reflected successful teaching in *Creating Significant Learning Experiences: An Integrated Approach to*
Designing College Courses. According to Fink (2013), the most important part of his list for successful teaching was the need to have students be challenged by learning that was considered significant and had value to the learner. Next, the teacher used active-learning activities with the learners. Third, the teacher cared about the learners and the content as well as teaching and learning. Fourth, the teacher needed to interact well with learners. Lastly, feedback, assessment, and grading must be done well by the teacher. If these five concepts were present, the teacher would have a positive impact on learners (Fink, 2013).

Rossetti’s (2002) study focused on university faculty who had won a specific teaching award. She identified four themes—presence, promotion of learning, teachers as learners, and enthusiasm—that could be used to identify effective or influential teachers. The first theme, presence, referred to the relationship between the professors and their students with the possibility of the relationship continuing professionally beyond the class (Rossetti, 2002). She indicated that promotion of learning was the idea that the professor was dedicated to teaching and promoting lifelong learning. The third theme mentioned by Rossetti (2002), teachers as learners, conveyed the professors’ beliefs in constantly learning themselves through research, content, and service to their community. The fourth theme she highlighted was enthusiasm toward teaching, which included an enthusiastic teaching style as well as an enthusiasm and passion for their work.

The literature on teacher effectiveness identifies many characteristics that when combined into themes provide a context in which to understand teacher effectiveness. In particular, the qualities suggested by the researchers concluded that personal characteristics, understanding of teaching and learning, content knowledge, and style of interaction and role impact the effect a teacher has in the classroom from kindergarten through university courses.
Adult Learners

In response to societal expectations, schools in the United States have evolved to serve many purposes. To understand the background of learners seeking adult basic and secondary education, it is helpful to understand high school education and why those returning to school as adults might have left the traditional setting.

High School

In response to the expectations of society, schools have developed into a venue for passing on the democratic ideals of our country, an academically accepted curriculum, and employment skills necessary for the workplace (Martin & Fisher, 1989). Today’s high school is modeled after those developed in the late 1800s (Martin & Fisher, 1989). High school completion is recognized as symbolic of having the knowledge and skills society deems necessary for entry into college and basic level employment (Martin & Fisher, 1989). However, while the lack of high school graduation has been occurring since the early years of high school inception, the percent of students who complete high school has been growing. Only a low number of eligible youth went to high school in the early 1900s and few finished, contributing to a high school completion rate of only about 10% (Martin & Fisher, 1989). In the 1950s high school completion rose to about 50% (Martin & Fisher, 1989) and by the 2012–13 school year, the completion rate had risen to 81%, indicating more than four out of five students in the United States had graduated from high school within four years of starting ninth grade (McFarland, Stark, & Cui, 2016).

The percent of high school graduates has increased over time, but there are still students unable to complete. Looking at the research, both social and personal reasons contribute to
students leaving high school prior to graduation (Martin & Fisher, 1989). In 2012, the National Center for Education Statistics surveyed learners who would have been in the ninth grade in 2009 but instead left school. The learners were asked about their reasons for leaving high school. Getting behind on schoolwork or getting poor grades was the most common reason given (74% of respondents). The next most often given answer was the thought that it would be easier to get a high school equivalency (62%). The learner not liking school was the next most often given answer to the survey (49%). Smaller percentages of respondents said taking care of a family member or needing to support their family financially (26%), being suspended or expelled from school (19%), unable to attend school and work at the same time (17%), high school completion was not needed for their goal (16%), early admission to occupational training and friends dropping out of school (14%) were other reasons they left school (McFarland et al., 2016).

**Returning Learners**

Returning to school can be daunting, so it is important for learners to find ways to motivate themselves to persist. Learners with high levels of self-efficacy, or who think they will do well on a task (Bandura, 1977), are more likely to persist in school (National Research Council, 2012a, 2012b). Learners who are more confident in their literacy abilities tend to be more engaged in learning (Bandura, 1977; National Research Council, 2012b). Having reasonable short-term and long-term goals allow learners to have greater success, and that greater success can lead to stronger feelings of self-efficacy (National Research Council, 2012b). How a teacher provides feedback and assessment can also impact the way learners feel about themselves (Guskey, 2003). When feedback and assessment are provided in ways that focus on the process of learning, the importance of using learning strategies, and monitoring one’s own
learning, they contribute positively to learner motivation (National Research Council, 2012b). Learners’ motivation can also be piqued by opportunities for choice and self-direction (Knowles et al., 2005). Even small choices within the classroom can provoke feelings of autonomy for learners (National Research Council, 2012b). Learner motivation can also be impacted by activities that the learner values and finds interesting (National Research Council, 2012b).

Learners come back to school because they believe education will help them learn new things and help them in everyday situations with which they are currently struggling (Ginsburg & Gal, 1996). As these learners look to adult education programs, they fall into one of two groups. One group has already established basic skills and strategies, is in need of developing more specialized and higher order skills and strategies, and is ready to focus on preparing for the high school equivalency credential (Taylor, 1989). This group of learners is functioning at or above the ninth-grade level and would be in adult secondary education (ASE) programs (SCCB, 2018). The second group of learners has minimal skills in reading, writing, and math and needs to focus on improving these basic literacy skills (Taylor, 1989). This second group is functioning below the ninth-grade level and would be in adult basic education (ABE) programs. Due to their low literacy skills, learners in ABE programs are likely to find everyday literacy activities challenging (Taylor, 1989).

The complexity of adults’ lives limits the time adult learners have to spend in formal learning situations (National Research Council, 2012b). According to a study done by Styles (2011), learners reported situational barriers as the primary reason for leaving an adult education program. In her study, Styles (2011) viewed situational barriers as the learner not having enough time to study, having home and job responsibilities, not having childcare, not having transportation, and having trouble with the law.
Teachers as Learners

Faculty are the foundation of adult education. As most adult educators enter the field without domain-specific training, it is important to provide as many opportunities as possible for those skills and strategies to be developed.

Professional Development

Through participation in professional development activities, teachers influence their knowledge, skills, and dispositions, increasing their capacity (King & Newmann, 2001). Often the concepts covered through professional development activities come about from policies and programs initiated by various organizations. Policies and programs implemented by both internal and external agencies impact the service providers who are mandated to meet the requirements (King & Newmann, 2001).

In the case of adult education service providers, an internal agency is the community college or other organization hosting the adult education program, while an example of an external agency is the state community college board or other state educational board that oversees adult education. These agencies may put forth policies and programs related to such things as content standards, curriculum, student assessment, and initiative models to which service providers under their purview are expected to respond (King & Newmann, 2001). To influence their knowledge, skills, and dispositions toward these concepts, teachers attend professional development sessions with the intention of building their capacity (King & Newmann, 2001).

Often professional development topics are dictated by other entities, both internal and external, without teacher involvement (King & Newmann, 2001). For professional development
to successfully build teacher capacity, teacher professional development has to include key principles for teacher learning (King & Newmann, 2001). For example, to be learned and applied to the classroom, professional development needs to focus on content teachers see as relevant to their specific setting (King & Newmann, 2001).

When teachers are able to participate in decision making regarding the content and delivery of the professional development, learning is more likely to occur (King & Newmann, 2001; Lieberman, 1995; Richardson, 1990). Involvement in these decisions increases teachers’ opportunities to connect the professional development to their specific setting (King & Newmann, 2001) and to reflect on how it aligns with their own beliefs (Richardson, 1990).

**Teacher Learning**

The type of learning activities encouraged for students, a variety of “opportunities that engage them in experiencing, creating, and solving real problems, using their own experiences, and working with others” is rarely considered for teachers (Lieberman, 1995, p. 67). However, teachers learn in ways similar to students, so professional development should be created in ways that encourage teachers to engage themselves in their learning in the same ways they would encourage their students (Lieberman, 1995). Putnam and Borko (2000) concur that most discussions surrounding learning and implications for educational practice have focused on students. Less attention has been given to the idea of teachers as learners (Putnam & Borko, 2000).

Teacher learning is more likely to take place when professional development opportunities are sustained, including time to experiment with and reflect on the learning and receive feedback (King & Newmann, 2001; Lieberman, 1995; Putnam & Borko, 2000).
learning is also more likely when teachers focus on outcomes and instruction specific to their teaching contexts (King & Newmann, 2001; Lieberman, 1995; Putnam & Borko, 2000). In addition to the expertise of outside professionals, collaboration with fellow teachers also enhances teacher learning (King & Newmann, 2001), as the common goals and experiences of professional peers make them well-respected conduits of feedback (Little, 1993; Wenger, 2000).

Informal Learning

Informal learning is one of three contexts for learning (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). In addition to informal learning, the other two contexts are formal and nonformal learning (Merriam et al., 2007). These different kinds of learning overlap and support each other (Cofer, 2000; Merriam et al., 2007; Rogers, 2002; Schugurensky, 2000) and, in some situations, contradict each other (Schugurensky, 2000). Formal learning situations are curriculum driven and highly structured educational settings, like the traditional classroom (Merriam et al., 2007; Schugurensky, 2000). Organized learning contexts found outside of formal settings, but still guided by curriculum like those offered by museums, libraries, and park districts, are known as nonformal learning (Merriam et al., 2007; Schugurensky, 2000).

The process of informal learning takes place when the learning comes as a result of everyday encounters (Cofer, 2000; Marsick & Watkins, 2001; Merriam et al., 2007). This kind of learning happens continuously throughout life (Tight, 2002; Vezne & Gunbayi, 2016). Informal learning may be deliberate but not particularly structured, such as networking, mentoring, coaching, and self-directed learning (Marsick & Watkins, 2001). Informal learning may also be subconscious and unique to and controlled by the learner (Cofer, 2000). Since informal learning is rooted in everyday lives, it can be difficult to recognize; however, the majority of adults have
participated in countless hours of informal learning (Merriam et al., 2007; Rogers, 2002; Schugurensky, 2000) and most workplace learning is informal (Merriam et al., 2007). The learner-centered focus of informal learning, combined with the ability to gain from life experience, makes informal learning paramount to adult learning (Marsick & Watkins, 2001).

Using intentionality and awareness to categorize learning contexts, informal learning can be further framed into self-directed learning, incidental learning, and socialization (Schugurensky, 2000). According to Schugurensky (2000), self-directed learning is intentional and conscious since the learner has a purpose for the learning and is aware it is taking place. For example, an individual wants to learn about a historical event, so one reads books on the topic along with visits to libraries and museums. When the learning is unintentional, but conscious, it is referred to as incidental learning (Schugurensky, 2000). A person watching a news program and learning about an ethnic group being treated unfairly, a happening about which one was previously unaware but is now conscious, is incidental learning (Schugurensky, 2000). Finally, the subcategory in which learning is neither intended, nor conscious, is socialization (Schugurensky, 2000). According to Schugurensky, socialization is “the internalization of values, attitudes, behaviors, skills, etc. that occur during everyday life” (2000, p. 4)–for example, the regular meeting of a group participating in an activity becoming increasingly skillful over time without realizing the long-term process. However, one might look back to see the learning had taken place, a concept known as retrospective recognition (Berg & Chyung, 2008; Schugurensky, 2000).

Looking closer at informal learning research, in a study of 125 workplace learning and performance improvement professionals, Berg and Chyung (2008) found no significant relationship between the level of learning culture in the organization and the level of work-
related informal learning engagement of the employees. This may seem surprising, as one may assume that a strong learning culture would lead to more informal learning opportunities; however, this may also suggest that employees engage in informal learning regardless of the culture of the organization or perhaps the individual learning is dwarfed by other types of group or institutional learning opportunities (Berg & Chyung, 2008). The study also found more new knowledge was gained by participants from informal learning than formal training, with interest in the current field being the top reason to engage in informal learning opportunities (Berg & Chyung, 2008).

Vezne and Gunbayi’s (2016) case study of teachers’ opinions on the contribution of informal learning to their professional development found talking with their professional colleagues as well as searching on the internet had positive influences on their professional development. Teachers in this study were also asked to provide metaphors for their informal learning, with the majority comparing informal learning to things including animals and nature (Vezne & Gunbayi, 2016). One participant likened informal learning to a bee, suggesting that “a bee collects pollen to form the honey and make it more delicious. Good things happen as long as people collect knowledge from everywhere” (Vezne & Gunbayi, 2016, p. 19).

Organizational Socialization

Workplace settings influence their members from the moment they begin until the time they cease participating in the work organization (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). This influence, or organizational socialization, is the process by which an individual learns the social knowledge, beliefs, perspectives, norms, and skills associated with membership in the organization, sometimes referred to as learning “the ropes” (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979, p. 3).
In the case of teachers, it is transforming the knowledge, beliefs, and behaviors into classroom practice (Retallick, 1993). Socialization is an ongoing, long-lasting, and highly contextualized process (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979) that begins informally as soon as an individual starts thinking about becoming a teacher (Lawson, 1983b), has its formal beginning with teacher education, and “continues throughout the career as teachers adjust, adapt, and change in their perspectives, roles, and environments” (Staton & Hunt, 1992, p. 109). Hence, the socialization process of teachers is a lifelong process (Lawson, 1983a).

A model of socialization highlighting three stages of influence and the connection among them stemmed from research on doctors and lawyers (Lawson, 1983b; Lortie, 1975) and informed Lortie’s (1975) seminal book *Schoolteacher: A Sociological Study*. This model addresses the stages of acculturation and recruitment, professional education, and entry into work (Lawson, 1983b).

The acculturation and recruitment stage of socialization focuses on when and why people decide to become teachers, including the beliefs, characteristics, and experiences that influence that decision (Lawson, 1983b). Each person has a subjective warrant—the ideas an individual holds of the knowledge, skills, and other requirements necessary to become a teacher—that develops over the many years spent as a student in school (Lawson, 1983b; Lortie, 1975). Subjective warrants for other careers are also developing, and whether any of these subjective warrants are accurate or not, they inform an individual’s career path (Lawson, 1983b; Lortie, 1975).

Professional socialization begins with professional education. Teacher education programs are intended to inculcate individuals with the knowledge, skills, and disposition needed to be an effective teacher. During this time, individuals develop along a continuum of custodial
or innovative orientations as they synthesize their subjective warrant with the learnings of the teacher education program (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979) and decide how to respond. Individuals holding a custodial orientation reproduce the socialization by continuing with the already developed strategies for job performance and content; those with innovative orientations try to alter the setting with changes to the strategies for job performance and content (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Fence-sitters, a third orientation, delay this decision (Lawson, 1983b).

After completing professional education and entering the workforce, organizational socialization begins to take place (Lawson, 1983a). Schools, like other organizations, socialize members both formally and informally (Lawson, 1983a). Those being socialized are not passive, and both the individual and institution are influenced by each other (Lawson, 1983b; Zeichner & Gore, 1989). The various parts of an organization depend on the socialization process to act like glue, holding the components together and keeping the organization running smoothly (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Influences on teacher socialization can be divided into context (organizational culture) and agents (people) as the two main notions (Huang, 2011).

In a qualitative study of community college student affairs professionals, socialization into the community college was found to be varied, complex, and contextual (Hornak et al., 2016). The two main themes of socialization described by the participants were professional and institutional (Hornak et al., 2016). “Institutional socialization reflects the ways that an institution socializes its employees . . . into its expectations, norms, culture, policy, and procedures” and in this case, both a specific institution and community college in general (Hornak et al., 2016, p. 122). Participants described socialization practices that Hornak et al. (2016) categorized as collective, individual, formal, and informal. For example, the introduction of institutional
policies and opportunities for professional development were provided by the human resource department of the community college through formal and collective tactics.

Additionally, policy education and leadership development specific to a particular position were socialized through individual and formal tactics (Hornak et al., 2016). Informal training while being on a cross-functional team was mentioned as helpful, as were other types of informal on-the-job training (Hornak et al., 2016). Further findings indicated entry-level and mid-level professionals did not use language specific to the discipline, which was thought to be due to a lack of professional development outside the institution and region, while upper-level professionals used disciplinary vocabulary (Hornak et al., 2016). Also, a conflict of views was found between those whose socialization had taken place only through one institution compared to those who had a wider professional socialization experience.

Learners have been identified as a primary agent of socialization (Lortie, 1975; Richardson & Placier, 2001; Staton & Hunt, 1992; Zeichner & Gore, 1989). Using mixed methods to investigate the socialization of English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers in a university setting, Huang (2011) found learners accounted for a large amount of teachers’ occupational expectations in that students’ positive recognition influenced teachers’ feelings of career success. The teachers reflected on the reward of making a difference in students’ lives (Huang, 2011).

Another valued agent of socialization was colleagues and mentors (Staton & Hunt, 1992). In a qualitative study of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in Mexico, Lengeling, Pablo, and Gasca (2017) investigated the teachers’ process of socialization and how the process shaped their identity formation. Entering the career of teaching is a complex transition “when teachers learn and understand values, behaviors, expectations, traditions, regulations, and morals
within a society of teachers” (Lengeling et al., 2017, p. 43). Based on the narratives and interviews, one of the findings related to the appreciation felt by teachers who received institutional support. One participant was grateful for the materials, moral support, and guidance she was given by a role model within the institution, which she said played an important part in how she perceived herself and the amount of commitment she felt to the teaching profession (Lengeling et al., 2017).

Bullough (1993) explored the socialization process of a junior high school teacher through a case study at the beginning of her career and again after five years. Consistent with Lengeling et al. (2017), the new teacher viewed her mentor as a positive career influence (Bullough, 1993). In a study of 11 experienced Australian teachers, a similar conclusion was found regarding the positive impact of role models in providing support early in a teacher’s career and forming a commitment to teaching (Macdonald, 1999). Sharing of materials and other kinds of support from colleagues also enhanced the experienced teachers’ satisfaction with teaching (Macdonald, 1999). In contrast, study participants who were lacking institutional support questioned their professional identity and sense of belonging in the profession (Lengeling et al., 2017). Lengeling et al. (2017) concluded teachers needed to recognize the socialization process and the influence it had on the formation of their identity.

The influences of the socialization process can lead to changes, including teaching perspectives, concerns, and roles (Staton & Hunt, 1992). Addressing teacher concerns at the beginning of a career with discipline and curriculum, and later with student motivation, Bullough (1993) concluded the significant issues teachers faced in their career became more complex over time. Macdonald (1999) agreed, determining that as teachers’ expertise developed, attention moved toward individual students and a social justice focus. Similar conclusions were made by
Stylianou, Kulinna, Cothran, and Kwon (2013) in their study of new and experienced elementary and secondary school teachers. Using a mixed methods design, the results indicated many teachers used guiding metaphors to describe their initial teaching, their current teaching, and their ideal teaching (Stylianou et al., 2013). These results depicted an evolution of early career teacher-centered metaphors to learner-centered metaphors as they developed in their career (Stylianou et al., 2013).
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study focused on the socialization of adult basic and secondary education teachers since qualitative research, as defined by Merriam (2009), focuses on “how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (p. 13). The intersection of the personal stories of the research participants (Glesne, 1999) allowed their voices to be heard and their stories to be told.

The chapter is laid out in the following way. After a restatement of the research questions, the research design is identified, and the research site and criteria for the participants as well as the data collection and data analysis strategies are described. The chapter concludes with a discussion of trustworthiness and researcher positionality.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this qualitative case study:

1. How do teachers describe their career journey to being adult educators?
2. How do teachers describe their socialization into adult education?
3. How do teachers describe how teaching adult education has influenced their perspective on teaching?

Qualitative Research

According to Merriam (2009), “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they
attribute to their experiences” (p. 5). These meanings are multiple, socially constructed, complex, and abstract (Glesne, 1999). Additionally, qualitative research focuses on the process rather than the outcome or the product of the phenomenon and illustrates the participants’ interpretations of their experiences (Merriam, 2009). This type of research takes place in real-world settings where the researcher looks for patterns and themes and then generalizes those patterns and themes into models that provide an understanding of the participants’ lived experiences (Glesne, 1999).

Research Design

The research design and research questions go hand in hand. Part of design selection is determining whether the design is appropriate to answer the research questions.

Case Study

One particular design of qualitative research is the case study; Merriam (2009) describes a case study as “an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (p. 40). As defined by Merriam (2009), case studies have the qualities of being particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic. The current study had all three of Merriam’s (2009) case study attributes. First, the study was particularistic (centering on the particular). The unit of analysis in this study was teachers in one adult basic and secondary education program. This placed a limit on the data collection via interviews and artifacts by having a system bounded to the number of teachers in this particular program. Second, the study was descriptive (richly written). This study vividly described the experiences of teachers in one adult basic and secondary education program through the collection of interviews and artifacts. Third, the study was heuristic (provided an opportunity for learning or discovery). This study helped to understand how teachers in one adult basic and
secondary education program viewed their process of socialization. Further, as the interest in this study was based on “insight, discovery, and interpretation” as opposed to the testing of a hypothesis, a qualitative case study was the appropriate design (Merriam, 2009, p. 42).

In this study, the researcher looked at part-time adjunct instructors who taught in the Adult Basic and Secondary Education Department of a Midwestern community college, which will be referred to as Midwestern Community College. Focusing on just this case offered an opportunity to learn what this particular group of teachers believed about their process of socialization. Through interviews and artifacts, the teachers were given a voice and their particular perspectives and experiences were explored and then described.

Constructivism Epistemology

When considering the epistemology for one’s study, Crotty (1998) suggests asking, “What kind of knowledge do we believe will be attained by our research? What kind of characteristics do we believe knowledge to have?” (p. 2). Since “there is no true or valid interpretation” (Crotty, 1998, p. 47), when looking at teachers’ socialization or how they describe their experiences, a constructivist epistemology was an appropriate choice for this study. A person brings a personal biography to teaching that “is a result of prior experiences in combination with unique personal characteristics” (Staton & Hunt, 1992, p. 129). Each person’s “biography acts a screen or filter through which new experiences are interpreted. This filter serves a sense-making function, helping to fit new learning into previously held conceptions” (Staton & Hunt, 1992, p. 129). Constructivists believe that even when experiencing the same phenomenon, meaning may be socially constructed in different ways by different people (Crotty, 1998). Further, Crotty (1998) concluded that each meaning is as valid as any other meaning.
While some teachers in the study had similar perspectives, others had different ones. Each of their perspectives were viewed with the same level of respect in the study.

Description of Site and Participants

The study focused on 10 adjunct faculty members teaching in an adult basic and secondary education department, within an adult education division, of a suburban community college in a Midwestern state.

Research Site

This study took place in the Adult Basic and Secondary Education (ABE/ASE) department of Midwestern Community College. The college was founded in the 1940s and became a community college district in the 1960s. The district covers over 350 square miles and serves over 20 rural and suburban communities, including 11 public high schools and four private high schools (Institutional Website, 2017). The college offers university transfer and career-technical programs as well as continuing education, workforce development, and adult education. (Institutional Website, 2017). For the 2015-2016 academic year, the college enrollment was 16,114; those learners identified as 45.9% male and 54.1% female with an average age of 27 years old. Institutional data (2017) also show the learners’ race and ethnicity demographics reflect a population that identifies as White, non-Hispanic 44%; Hispanic 40.3%; Asian/Pacific Islander 6.7%; Black, non-Hispanic 4.9%; American Indian/Alaskan 0.5%; Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander 0.2%; Non-resident Alien 0.5%; Unknown 2.9%.

The ABE/ASE Department, combined with the English as a Second Language (ESL) Department, make up the Adult Education Division of the college. The ESL and ABE/ASE Departments serve approximately 3,000 learners per year. Learners served by the ABE/ASE
Department can be as young as 16 and go through late adulthood. They attend classes in the department seeking preparation to earn a high school equivalency certificate.

**Participant Selection Criteria**

Qualitative research, in contrast to quantitative research, typically utilizes a small purposeful sample (Merriam, 2009). Small samples allow for detailed analysis (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014), and purposeful samples are selected for being most able to assist the researcher in understanding the particular concept being studied (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009). This study included 10 participants. To participate, the teachers had taught adult basic or secondary education part-time at Midwestern community college for at least two years. Full-time faculty and those who taught in other types of organizations might have different socialization experiences, so they were not included as participants. A recruitment email was sent out to adjunct faculty in the adult basic and secondary education department. Interviews were arranged with faculty in the order in which they responded to the initial recruitment request.

**Participants’ Demographic Data**

Ten adult education teachers at Midwestern Community College volunteered to participate in this study. All participants taught adult basic or secondary education part-time at the research site. Overall, the study participants had an average of six and a half years as adjunct instructors in adult education at this community college and all 10 also had teaching experience prior to being hired by the adult education division. Eight of the participants’ prior experience was gained by teaching in a K-12 system. Two of the participants had taught developmental or transfer-level courses at other community colleges.
When considering full-time employment, five participants were working full-time elsewhere in addition to their part-time teaching position at the community college. Three of those five participants were teaching full-time in K-12 districts. The other five participants were only teaching part-time, including two who were also adjunct faculty at other community colleges. Teaching had been the only profession for six of the ten participants, but four started out as professionals in other fields before having second careers in education. Those participants had earlier careers in the banking industry, computer programming, the legal field, or real estate. The highest degree for eight of the participants was a master’s, one participant had a bachelor’s, and the final participant had a doctoral degree. Table 1 shows a summary of the participant demographics.

Participants

The following ten participants are adjunct instructors of adult basic and secondary education at Midwestern Community College. They have all taught in the adult education division for at least two years.

Jeanette

Jeanette has been teaching part-time in the adult education division at Midwestern Community College for almost six years. She has taught both reading and math during that time, but now she primarily teaches math. She has a bachelor’s degree in elementary education and a master’s in curriculum and instruction. Jeanette started her career by teaching fourth grade for several years. However, shortly after the birth of her first child, she started as an adjunct instructor at Midwestern Community College. Jeannette’s part-time adult education faculty
**Table 1**

*Participant Overview*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Years in Adult Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experience Teaching in Other Educational Settings</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-12 System</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College (developmental or transfer)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teaching Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Part-Time Only</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Part-Time along with Full-Time Employment</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Highest Education Level</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral Degree</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Careers Prior to Career in Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
position has led to a full-time position in adult education professional development at another grant-funded entity. She has retained her adjunct position in part because the two positions complement each other.

Jenny

Jenny has been a part-time instructor at Midwestern Community College for four years. She teaches math and reading in the adult education division. Jenny has a bachelor’s degree in general K-12 education and a master’s in special education. Jenny has a wide expanse of teaching experiences, primarily at the middle and high school levels. Before retiring from the K-12 system, Jenny taught in self-contained special education settings, co-taught, and tutored students who were out of school for a continuum of reasons, including “medical leave or drug rehab or having babies.” Jenny has also taught preservice teachers at a local university and served as a volunteer adult literacy tutor through her local library.

Anika

Anika is in her 11th year of teaching part-time in the adult education division at Midwestern Community College, where she teaches all levels of math as well as the basic computer course. Anika has bachelor’s degrees in math and education, a master’s in math, and is working on a master’s in education. In addition to teaching in the adult basic and secondary education department at Midwestern Community College, Anika teaches developmental and transfer-level math courses at other local community colleges and has tutored for math courses.
Ariel

Ariel has been an adult education adjunct instructor for seven years at Midwestern Community College, where he teaches at the main campus and an outreach site. He teaches reading and math classes in English as well as Spanish. Ariel speaks of relating to his students because, in his words, his education “was quite choppy.” Although Ariel almost did not graduate from high school, dropped out of community college, and made several attempts before completing his bachelor’s, he ultimately earned master’s and doctoral degrees. Ariel previously taught in a bilingual elementary program and now works full-time in real estate in addition to teaching part-time at the college. Teaching was his second career, as he also worked full-time in real estate before going into education.

Carrie

Carrie has been teaching reading and writing in the adult basic and secondary education program at Midwestern Community College for six years. Carrie has bachelor’s and master’s degrees and has taught in the K-12 system for over 25 years, ranging from first and sixth grades to special education at the elementary and middle school level. Carrie also worked at a home for adults with disabilities, where she taught life skills and basic academic skills to the residents. Currently, Carrie is a full-time reading specialist in a K-12 district along with being an adult education adjunct instructor.

Lara

Lara is completing her second year at Midwestern Community College, where she teaches reading and writing in the adult education program. Her first experience as a part-time
faculty member in the division was teaching a multilevel class at an outreach site, although since that experience, she has been teaching at the main campus. Lara has a bachelor’s and two master’s degrees. She continues to teach full-time at the same middle school at which she has taught for over 20 years while also teaching as an adjunct faculty member at Midwestern Community College.

**Bernadette**

Bernadette has been teaching part-time at Midwestern Community College for over seven years. She teaches all levels of math in the adult education program. Bernadette has bachelor’s degrees in math and education. She had a career in the legal field before teaching developmental and transfer-level math part-time at a local community college. A desire to adjunct at an additional community college brought Bernadette to adult education at Midwestern Community College. After teaching adult education at the community college for several years, she added facilitation of the high school equivalency program at the county correctional center to her part-time positions.

**Marie**

Marie has been an adjunct instructor in the adult education division at Midwestern Community College for 15 years. In recent years she has primarily been teaching reading but has also taught math. Marie has a bachelor’s and a master’s degree. She taught fourth grade for a few years in a K-12 district before taking time off to start her family. After staying home with her children for a while, a friend told her Midwestern Community College was “a great place to work,” so Marie decided to apply.
Kay

Kay primarily teaches the advanced level course which includes language arts, science, and social studies. She has a bachelor’s in history and a master’s in education. Teaching is Kay’s second career. According to Kay, “I was in banking for years and years and years prior to going back to school and getting a master’s in education.” After observing the “really good teachers” her own children had, Kay decided to be a teacher to “make an impact on children’s lives.” During her time in the K-12 system, Kay taught a variety of history and other social studies classes at two high schools. Following a move to a new state, Kay was substitute teaching when she found out about teaching adult education at Midwestern Community College.

Susan

Susan is completing her second year as an adjunct at Midwestern Community College, where she teaches most of the math levels. According to Susan, “I originally went to college and got my degree in math and computer science. I did not want to teach.” However, after working for a while as a computer programmer and tutoring on the side, Susan realized she missed math and connecting with students. This realization led Susan to complete a master’s degree in teaching. She has taught high school math and currently teaches middle school math, but she “really wanted to get into [MCC] and start teaching there,” so she applied when she saw the adjunct opening.

Table 2 shows participants’ individual characteristics.
Table 2

*Participant Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Years in Adult Education</th>
<th>Highest Related Degree</th>
<th>Prior Teaching Experience in K-12 or Community College</th>
<th>Adjunct Only or In Addition to Full-Time Position</th>
<th>Career Field Prior to Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jeanette</td>
<td>6 Years</td>
<td>Master's</td>
<td>K-12</td>
<td>In Addition to Full-Time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>4 Years</td>
<td>Master's</td>
<td>K-12</td>
<td>Adjunct Only</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anika</td>
<td>11 Years</td>
<td>Master's</td>
<td>Community College</td>
<td>Adjunct Only</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ariel</td>
<td>7 Years</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>K-12</td>
<td>In Addition to Full-Time</td>
<td>Real Estate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrie</td>
<td>6 Years</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>K-12</td>
<td>In Addition to Full-Time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lara</td>
<td>2 Years</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>K-12</td>
<td>In Addition to Full-Time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bernadette</td>
<td>7 Years</td>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>Community College</td>
<td>Adjunct Only</td>
<td>Legal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie</td>
<td>15 Years</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>K-12</td>
<td>Adjunct Only</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kay</td>
<td>5 Years</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>K-12</td>
<td>Adjunct Only</td>
<td>Banking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>2 Years</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>K-12</td>
<td>In Addition to Full-Time</td>
<td>Computer Science</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Methods of Data Collection

As “the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis” (Merriam, 2009, p. 15) for qualitative research by observing, questioning, and interacting with study participants (Glesne, 1999), the methods for collecting data for this study included interviews and artifacts. Tellis (1997) states that by using multiple sources of data, more details can be drawn from the study.
Interviews

The most common data collection form in qualitative research is interviewing (Merriam, 2009). Interviewing was used in this study to seek information about the teachers’ journeys and their experience being socialized into adult education as well their perspectives on how their teaching had been influenced as a result of their adult education experiences, as none of these concepts could be directly observed. Semi-structured interviews were used for this study (Patton, 2002). This type of interview combined a more structured interview-gathering demographic and similar kinds of information, with a less structured interview using an interview guide with open-ended questions for probing or asking the participants for more information and taking the interview in unanticipated directions (Merriam, 2009).

Two face-to-face interviews were scheduled with each participant. Interviews for eight participants were held at Midwestern Community College and two local public libraries. The researcher and one participant were both at the multiday state adult education conference and conducted the interviews at the conference site. One participant was out of state while interviews were conducted, but volunteered to be interviewed by phone during the same time frame. On the day of the first interview, participants were provided additional information about the study and were asked to sign a consent form indicating their agreement to participate and be audio recorded for the study. The consent form was emailed to the out-of-state participant and she scanned the signed copy back the day before the first interview. Participants selected, or were assigned, pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality, as was the research site and others named by participants. The interviews lasted 45-90 minutes each, so in total there were just under 30 hours of interviews audio recorded and transcribed. Some of the interview questions were piloted in a
small study completed in December 2015, which provided helpful information regarding the usefulness of the questions (Merriam, 2009).

**Artifacts**

The participants were asked to submit a paragraph, essay, picture, photograph, collage, etc. (Glesne, 1999) that illustrated some part of their socialization that was particularly meaningful. Participants brought books representing learner journeys, photographs of themselves with peers, a musical instrument, a drawing, a word cloud, and a file folder representing a rolling cart used to ease the carrying of teacher instructional materials. One participant compared adult education students to the sculpture of an impossible triangle in Perth, Australia. Using photo elicitation, these visual artifacts assisted in further understanding the participants’ perceptions (Denton, Kortegast, & Miller, 2018; Harper, 2002).

“Visuals are embedded in our everyday lives” (Denton et al., 2018, p. 13). According to Harper (2002), most studies using photo elicitation have used photographs, but studies could use just about any visual image. By looking at the visual artifacts brought in by the participants in addition to the text of the interviews, new information came forward (Denton et al., 2018; Harper, 2002) and added to the rich descriptions of participants’ experiences.

**Methods of Data Analysis**

Analyzing or making sense of the data took place concurrently with collecting the data (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 2014). The reason for analyzing at least the first few interviews while still collecting data came from the fact that qualitative research emerged as the study progressed (Yazan, 2015), so this concurrent activity allowed revisions to take place during the
study. For example, when a question or follow-up question arose that was not asked of earlier participants, but yielded helpful data, the question was asked of the remaining participants. Conversely, if there was an interview question that did not seem to be getting answers to the research questions, the question could be revised or deleted, or additional questions could be added to the interview guide.

Following transcription of the audio recorded interviews, the transcripts and artifacts were uploaded to computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) that helped organize the qualitative data sources (Miles et al., 2014). As Bogdan and Biklen (2007) concluded, researchers are like detectives who put together all the pieces of the interview and other data to better understand the study participants’ perspectives. Coding was used to develop themes and patterns, which provided the scaffolding for the research findings.

The first round of coding was open coding, identifying anything that might later prove to be relevant to the study (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009). These codes were specific words or concepts. The codes were then categorized with the ultimate goal of finding recurring patterns and themes. As part of the interview, participants were asked to describe how their artifact reflected their experience of socialization into adult education. Those descriptions were transcribed and coded along with participant interviews. All sources of data were looked at together when the researcher was seeking patterns and themes (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Merriam 2009; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009).

Analytic memos combined with second cycle coding and categorizing led to higher level themes and assertions (Saldana, 2013). The purpose of second cycle coding was to reorganize and reconfigure first cycle codes into a smaller and more concise list of broader categories (Saldana, 2013). With each successive cycle of coding, the list of codes became smaller, leading
to categories, then themes, and finally assertions that then became the heart of the write-up (Saldana, 2013). In the current study, I employed axial coding, using a category’s properties or dimensions and how they related to one another by sorting similarly coded data into groups and then developing assertions (Saldana, 2013). I also used analytic memo writing to explore categories (Saldana, 2013), reflect on, and synthesize the data (Miles et al., 2014). Through the cycles of coding and memo writing, formal conclusions or assertions were developed from the data (Miles et al., 2014).

Trustworthiness

In an effort to “make it more likely that credible findings and interpretations will be produced” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301), trustworthiness was addressed in the following ways. The first was through triangulation or the seeking of support and corroboration of the findings (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009; Tellis, 1997). I compared multiple data forms, including methods and sources, to see what patterns developed and what findings were supported (Miles et al., 2014). This was done by looking at the multiple perspectives of the participants as well as the consistency of themes and patterns that developed throughout the interviews and artifacts.

The full-time teacher in the program, who was not a participant in the study, was asked to look over the data for her thoughts on its credibility; this type of external audit also added to the trustworthiness of the study (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009). Not only has she taught in the adult basic and secondary education program at Midwestern Community College for over twenty years, first as an adjunct instructor and then as a full-time faculty member, she also worked in the K-12 system as a certified teacher. She is highly thought of by her peers. The full-time faculty member does not have any positionality over the adjunct faculty
members. Although there are some scenarios in which she could evaluate adjunct faculty, this has not taken place and is a rare occurrence among any full-time division faculty.

With pseudonyms intact, the researcher provided a draft of each findings section for the full-time faculty member to read in advance of meeting to discuss the findings. Meetings took place off campus to further encourage candid conversation regarding the findings. The full-time faculty member mentioned some of the faculty discussions that had taken place over time and how they mirrored the comments made by participants during the interviews. She corroborated the study findings and shared the similarities between her story of falling into adult education as an adjunct instructor with those of the participants.

Lastly, reflexivity or the position of the researcher (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009) is addressed to understand how it might have impacted the study.

Positionality

It is important to know that I have been a teacher of adult basic and secondary education at Midwestern Community College, so I have my own experiences of socialization into this department and this college, but my experiences and perspectives are not necessarily those of the teachers who were interviewed. My influence on the department and division does not stop with my teaching experience. I was hired into the ABE/ASE Department at Midwestern Community College as an adjunct faculty member and taught a number of the department offerings on the main campus as well as at an outreach site that provided classes for students who were considered particularly challenging.

While I was an adjunct faculty member, I was hired into a part-time administrative role. The college policy has since changed, but at the time, I was able to continue teaching while
holding the part-time administrative role. As part of that position, I was an evaluator of and a resource for department faculty. My next position in the department was as the senior director for ABE/ASE. As a department leader, the responsibilities of this full-time administrative position included hiring, training, assigning, and evaluating faculty; developing curricula; and program assessment.

After over a year and half as an interim dean, I recently became dean of the Adult Education Division. This role provides academic and administrative leadership, but faculty no longer report directly to me. Throughout my time in this division, I have become known as a good listener who considers others’ perspectives when making decisions. I also have the reputation of having a collaborative spirit by including faculty and staff in large projects and decisions. I include this information to illustrate that I not only have my own experience with socialization within the department and college, but that many of my actions may directly or indirectly have influenced the socialization of the faculty I interviewed.

Due to my role as an administrator at Midwestern Community College, I intentionally kept any type of classroom observation or program evaluation out of this study to keep the lines of researcher and supervisor as clear as possible. My goal during the research process was to be a compassionate facilitator, thoughtful listener, and accurate recorder (Huang, 2011).
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

In this case study, the researcher sought to determine how adjunct faculty were socialized into the adult basic and secondary education department of a community college. By looking at part-time teachers who had at least two years of adult education experience this study fills a gap, as most of the teacher socialization literature focuses on preservice and first-year teachers. The following questions guided this qualitative case study:

1. How do teachers describe their career journey to being adult educators?
2. How do teachers describe their socialization into adult education?
3. How do teachers describe how teaching adult education has influenced their perspective on teaching?

In the first section of this chapter participants share their perceptions of the purpose for adult education. The remainder of the chapter is organized by the research questions and the respective themes that emerged from the participant interviews. The themes that developed throughout the teachers’ career journeys were how teachers got here, their preparation for adult education instruction, part-time work, and what teachers wished they had known about teaching in adult education. Next, the themes emerging from the teachers’ socialization into adult education were the rewards from and challenges of teaching learners in adult education, their interactions with their colleagues, and professionalism or the influence of administrators and the community college. The final themes were based on how teaching in adult education influenced
the participants’ perspective, including developing a more inclusive perspective, instructional initiatives, and the agents by which they were influenced.

Why Have Adult Education?

The participants perceived the purpose of adult education to be preparing learners to pass the GED or other high school equivalency exam, and making learners college and career ready as well as more personal applications like assisting learners in understanding their learning style, improving their reading skills, and being better able to relate to their children. The participants agreed each learner entered the program with a unique life story based on personal experience, brought different needs, and had their own specific goals in mind. Ariel explained using an analogy:

I always explain to my students on day one, first of all, I want to hear why they are here. Each of them has a different goal, just like each of us [has] a different purpose of what car to buy next, each of them [has] a different goal in their head.

Ariel’s car-buying analogy illustrates the reality of adult learners having their own goals when they enroll in adult education. Asking the learners to share their goals on the first day of class helped Ariel get to know his learners and subsequently better shape the curriculum to meet those goals.

High School Equivalency

Ariel went on to use another analogy, this time a bridge, with his learners. He suggested that enrolling in the adult education program was just the beginning of what they could accomplish and urged them not to let anything in their past hold them back. On the first day of class, Ariel asked his learners why they were there. He shared that the majority of his students came in saying they had come to pass the GED. Ariel responded to his learners:
Ok, I want to know what do you wish to do with it? Because imagine that where you’re sitting right now is a bridge between where you are now, and where you could potentially be in the future. And nothing that you are living through now will dictate who you could potentially be in the future.

Ariel used the bridge analogy to show his learners their many options. He wanted them to know earning their high school equivalency was the first step toward reaching their goals and that he would help them gain academic and self-efficacy skills. Bridge classes are common in adult education to enhance learners’ confidence and academic needs as learners transition from high school equivalency to college-level coursework.

**College and Career Readiness**

Like Ariel, the majority of participants agreed a primary reason for adult education was to prepare learners to pass the GED or another high school equivalency exam as well as develop the skills necessary for success in college or a career. Susan explained that in addition to working to pass the GED, she wanted learners to see these skills applied to jobs and further education:

Well, for what I’m teaching they are working on passing their GED, so getting the necessary skills that they need and then learning some career things so that they can use that and see how it’s applicable to jobs, and then some of them are planning even further education after getting their GED. So, it’s just kind of helping set them on that track and get them the skills that they need to be successful on the test and also in any careers that they might see.

Susan reflected on the need to connect her classroom practices with the workforce. She wanted learners to see the relationship between their college and career goals and the academic skills and strategies she was teaching.
Personal Growth

In addition to being college and career ready after attaining a high school equivalency credential, Anika spoke of other goals learners had for gaining their high school equivalency, like getting a promotion at their job and setting a positive example for their children. Anika shared that some learners want to pass the GED “for a promotion in their job . . . and for some others, just to pass the GED for their personal goals or they just want to be a role model for their kids.” This is significant because some adult learners already have a job but have been told by supervisors that getting a high school equivalency is all that stands between the learner and getting a promotion. Other adult learners want to earn a high school equivalency to set a positive example for their school-age children.

Together with GED or high school equivalency attainment, the participants also spoke of other purposes of adult education. Bernadette talked about learners benefitting from the structure provided by regularly attending class and the sense of belonging to a group:

The purpose is to assist these adults—old and young—in bettering their lives. We're supposed to help them get their high school equivalency, but even if that is not achieved, I think the social interaction, the structure of going to school is all beneficial. So, as you know, sometimes we have students who are not able to get their high school equivalency, but I think the sense of belonging and going somewhere reliable every day, a safe place, that all is just a part of the adult education that we provide.

Bernadette’s experience highlights the reality that some learners are unable to pass the high school equivalency exam, but adult education still provides them benefits. For those learners, having access to learning basic skills in a structured environment where they find camaraderie is also advantageous.

Similar to Bernadette, Marie mentioned other purposes of adult education that included developing self-supporting behaviors in learners. For example, the idea of developing self-reliant
community members was brought into the conversation by Marie, who believed one “purpose is to create a community where people have higher skills and they are more self-reliant and they are able to achieve their full potentials.” This connected well to Lara, who described “having conversations in class about the learning process, and learning styles, and metacognition, where you’re aware of what you know and don’t know, and how to study and how to take notes.” Marie and Lara’s statements highlight that sometimes, due to previous educational experience or the lack of educational experience, many adult basic and secondary learners lack confidence as well as knowledge regarding how to be successful in school.

Relating the Classroom to Everyday Life

Relating what is taking place in the classroom to everyday life also came up as a purpose of adult education. Carrie talked about the importance of finding ways to bring the curriculum to life so the learners were engaged and saw the relevance of the classroom:

But also, you're not just teaching them the curriculum; it's more lifelike, too. Like how is this going to apply to their life situations? Or if you're teaching them reading, how can they use that to help them in their everyday life with raising their own kids? So yes, you're teaching them the state standards, but you know, there's a lot that goes on, too.

Carrie’s comments show the importance of relating the curriculum beyond the classroom. She wanted learners to improve their reading so they could do things as personal as reading and connecting with their children at the end of day. Carrie went on to share a poignant illustration of that taking place in her classroom:

I know one time we were reading a book, actually A Long Walk to Water. And the student brought it home and their kid’s like, “Yeah, I read that too.” And so, they were able to have [a] conversation about the book and all the different life decisions that are made in that book with their kid, which was good. They said in the past it was hard to communicate with their child because there's nothing that they have in common to talk about. This gave them something in common to talk about, and it also gave them a
chance to talk about some of those life decisions that went on in the book, which would apply to them.

Carrie’s experience illustrated how adult education can improve family bonds. Carrie felt strongly that a purpose of adult education was to relate the curriculum to real life. The story of this learner shows Carrie’s point. Carrie described another example of learners finding relevance in the curriculum:

I encouraged the parents. Yes, you read in class. Go home and read a picture book to your kids. And they find that [they were] always afraid to do that, and now they have a little bit more confidence to go ahead and do that. So, they're making those connections, and hopefully if they're reading to the kids, we know it'll be better for the kids, too.

Carrie strongly believed in the positive influence adult education had on families. This is reflected in suggesting learners should go home and read to their children as they gained confidence in their reading ability.

Several participants noted that before becoming adult education faculty at Midwestern Community College they thought the only purpose of adult education was to prepare learners to pass a high school equivalency exam. Jeanette shared how her thoughts regarding the goals of adult education had changed since she started teaching at the community college:

I would say that before I started teaching at [MCC] or in adult ed period, I thought there was really only one goal. I hadn't really thought that students would be walking [in] and saying, “I want to do this for my children so that I can be able to help them with their homework.” I had thought the goal was I want my diploma. And I feel like that’s almost a societal stereotype, too. Even when I tell people what I do, they'll say, “Oh, so you're helping them get their diploma.” It's like, well, yes, but I'm also doing these other things because they have other goals.

Jeanette saw the various purposes of adult education through her experiences and those of the learners in her classroom. While preparing to pass a high school equivalency exam is still the
most well-known purpose of adult education, Jeanette acknowledged the individual goals learners brought to the classroom every day.

Faculty saw various purposes for adult education as learners walked in the door with a variety of needs and goals. However, preparation to pass the high school equivalency exam was still perceived by most participants as the main purpose of adult basic and secondary education.

Career Journey to Adult Education

Beyond the desire for a part-time teaching position, the journey to adult education was unplanned for the participants. Participants were seeking to teach at the community college in more well-known disciplines like transfer-level math and English, when they saw the adult education posting. Some were looking for a part-time job to pair with caring for children at home, while others were looking for part-time work to complement a full-time job or other part-time job. One participant wanted to adjunct as a way to stay in education following retirement from a K-12 teaching career. They all found ways to prepare as well as surprises on the way.

Falling into Adult Education by Accident: Finding the Career Journey

Almost all the participants in the study, while intentionally seeking part-time faculty positions, fell into teaching in the adult education division at Midwestern Community College by accident. This agrees with the literature indicating adult education instructors end up teaching in the field accidentally (Sabatini et al., 2000; Smith & Hofer, 2003). Most were looking for adjunct positions at Midwestern Community College in more well-known academic areas and saw openings for adult education or were referred by friends or someone who worked at Midwestern. Even though they were not familiar with adult education, the participants chose to apply.
Jeannette shared her desire to return to teaching, but in a part-time role. After having her first child:

And when adult ed kind of fell into my lap, as it does for most of us. I was in a new town. I had been subbing for about a year, year and a half. And I had a six-month-old, well, not even a six-month-old baby at the time. I had just been job searching, and I started branching out of the K-12 world because I had had my first child, and I started looking for something more part-time. And in the K-12 world, part-time usually means a paraprofessional. I wasn't sure that's what I wanted to do, so I was looking for other part-time possibilities that were still within the realm of teaching. I started reaching out to community colleges in the area to look at different jobs within that thinking, not even really recognizing that adult ed was a field at a community college. More so if I teach an English class, could I teach this class, you know, at the college level? And so, when I started noticing that those were the positions coming up, I was like, well, that makes sense. I already know that content. It's just to a different group of people. Right? So, I applied for those positions and then was called.

Jeanette wanted a part-time job in education but did not want to be a paraprofessional in a K-12 district. Originally, she was seeking a part-time position teaching transfer-level English when she saw the job posting for adult education. Feeling that the content would be similar even if the learners were not, Jeanette applied and was hired. Her story is relevant because it mirrors several of the participants’ stories. Jeanette further explained why the part-time position in adult education was a good fit for her:

And then I had this idea of I could be a person outside of [being a parent], I could do something in my career. I could teach. You know, which is something I like to do. And while I love of course being a mom, it was just kind of [something] different, tapping into a different part of my brain. So, getting into adult ed, as with most people, it found me. I didn't find it.

As Jeanette continued sharing how she started in adult education she clarified, while loving her role as a mom, she was excited to have the opportunity to return part-time to her teaching career. She also stated that she was not looking intentionally for an adult education teaching position;
instead, she was seeking to teach part-time and adult education found her, which was common among the participants.

A desire to work part-time while her daughter was young was also the impetus for Anika to seek an adjunct teaching position at Midwestern Community College. Anika talked about finding another part-time job at Midwestern after she began tutoring at the college:

My daughter was at that time like a year and a half old, I was looking for a part-time job. And first I applied at [MCC] and they hired me for a tutoring position. I was doing tutoring, and then I was looking for math positions initially. . . . That is how I got [into] adult education. Initially, I didn't know what we teach and all those things. I was actually hired for computer courses first. Then gradually I figured out...GED and all those things. Initially I didn't even know...GED.

Anika’s statements reiterate the same motivation as Jeanette. Anika, too, wanted a part-time teaching position that would allow her time to be home with her daughter. Like Jeanette, Anika first looked for college-level content courses in the discipline—in her case, math—before seeing the adult education opening.

Like Jeanette and Anika, the primary reason the adjunct position at Midwestern Community College appealed to Marie was because it was part-time, although she also liked the fact she would be able to focus on one discipline as opposed to the many she taught as an elementary school teacher, and community college students were older than those at the elementary school. Marie explained how she applied after a friend told her the college was a great place to work:

It was the desire for scheduling with my own family. And to focus on not twenty different subjects but more streamlined, and to work with grown-ups. That appealed to me, definitely. I had a friend who taught here for many years and . . . she said [adult education at MCC] was a great place to work and so I applied when we were down at [previous location of MCC’s adult education program] and then got into adult ed.
Highlighting the importance of Midwestern Community College employee referrals, Marie explained a friend had recommended adult education at MCC. Similar to Marie, the idea of working with community college-age students was also appealing to Susan and part of the reason she applied for an adjunct position at Midwestern Community College to supplement her full-time K-12 teaching position. Susan explained she was trying to get a position at Midwestern to teach students older than the middle and high school students she had been teaching:

I wanted to get into community college. That’s where I was really kind of looking. Partly because, although I really do like working with high school students and I’m working with middle school students now. I like high school better. I like them as they get older. I really felt like there’s so many behavior issues and things like that that I really would like to move up a level so I can get away from some of this…. So, I kind of want to get away from that a little bit so I was exploring options. I was teaching ACT and SAT prep at [MCC], so I wanted to see what was open and then the position was open and I got the interview to come in for that. I still was like I don’t know, we’ll see how this works out and from the second I started [teaching adult education] I really enjoyed it. I told a friend of mine that and she’s like, “That’s what I really want to be able to do as well,” is work with the adults. But I was just saying how much I really enjoyed it and loved it. I’ve worked with some adults through the years but not on that scale, and so I didn’t know, but to me it’s like a student is a student, so I work with any students and I didn’t realize how much I would love it.

Susan’s comments reflect another group of participants in that she is teaching part-time in adult education in addition to working full-time. Susan was seeking a part-time job at the community college to supplement her K-12 teaching position. She had other part-time jobs, but was still looking at open positions when she found the adult education position. Similar to Marie, Susan hoped to get away from some of the K-12 student behaviors by teaching at the community college.

Bernadette’s situation was a little different: she, too, found adult education by accident as she looked for part-time teaching positions, but she was looking to supplement her adjunct teaching position at another community college. Bernadette explained how she began looking for
teaching positions after losing her full-time job in the legal field during the recession of the late 2000s:

I wasn't aware of adult ed until I started looking online during the recession, when I lost my job. And then my world opened up. So, it just all happened to be just looking online and finding it. I wasn't aware of it. That's how I fell into it.

Bernadette’s statements indicate how she began looking for adjunct teaching positions during the recession after losing her full-time job in another field. She was looking at the college postings online and found the adult education opening. Bernadette continued, sharing her reasons for liking the combination of part-time positions over having a full-time position:

You know, again, the hours and the lifestyle, I became very accustomed to [them]. I found out that I really like [the hours] . . . I got used to not always being a 9 to 5 person. Okay? And I like that I had some flexibility in the morning, I didn't have to get up first thing in the morning. I could do stuff at night. The pay was good enough where I could support myself, but then I could also find other ways to earn income with rental income. And it gave me the freedom, so I like the freedom that adult ed provides with the hours. And I also like the variety. You know, and the fact that I can work at other places. Sometimes I feel like with job security, it was okay if I didn’t get a class at [Other Community College] because I had two other places that I could work at. You know? Whereas if you work a full-time job, a nine to five job, you lose that job and you're out. So, I learned my lesson during the recession because I was a legal secretary. I was making about 50 grand a year. When I lost my job, panic. Right? You lose your insurance. You lose everything. That recession really taught me a lesson. Then I started taking all these little jobs and I was like, hey, I might not be making a lot here, but if I take on two or three of them because they don't take up that much of my time. Then I can get to the same place I was at over here when I was . . . a legal secretary, I'd get the same income. I actually have more freedom. But the downside is that I don't have any benefits.

Bernadette’s perspective on wanting multiple part-time jobs was unique. She expressed feeling more stable and enjoying the variety of adjuncting at more than one community college in addition to getting income from owning rental property. Bernadette explained when she lost her full-time job in the legal field, she lost all her income, but by having multiple part-time incomes, losing one would not be as detrimental.
While Bernadette found adult education by looking at the college job openings online, two of the participants, Lara and Kay, had coworkers in other jobs also adjuncting in adult education at Midwestern Community College. They suggested the participants would enjoy the experience too. Lara had been teaching in her K-12 position for many years and was looking for something different when one of her K-12 colleagues told her about teaching adult education at Midwestern. Lara detailed her readiness to explore something new in education:

Well, I was…about year 17 at my other job; I was “been there, done that.” Seen it all. Felt like the pendulum [swinging], I’m seeing all that start to come back. . . . I’ve got some colleagues [who teach adult education]. I’m thinking of this route, coming and exploring adult basic ed. And my kids are growing, and I’m going to have some more time. Empty nest. I think it was just that it was getting stale. You know, talking with parents and seeing kid behavior. It’s like, oh, but faces were starting to look the same like that. I know—you’re that kid. You’re the one that’s going to be losing your homework and asking me for copies and never bringing a pencil. I know this kid! And there’s some security to having that expectation. You know how to prepare for it. But it was like, okay, here we are. We’re doing this. And here’s the parent that calls me every other day because of something I did or didn’t do. So, this environment was . . . when colleagues had told me about [adult education], I was just intrigued. How does that work? I don’t want to have parents calling me. And they’re choosing to be here. Eleven-year-olds aren’t. The adults are choosing to do this. I’m intrigued by that kind of a learner.

Like Bernadette, Lara had a unique perspective. Lara was finding her full-time K-12 position was getting stale and was seeking a new environment. She relished the idea of teaching a different population and was intrigued by adult education when her colleague spoke about it.

Similar to Lara, Kay discovered adult education through a K-12 colleague. Following a move from another state where she had been a K-12 high school teacher, Kay was substitute teaching at a local school district when one of her fellow teachers who taught adult education at Midwestern introduced the idea to Kay. Kay shared her frustration regarding the requirements for a teaching certificate in her new state and how a colleague made her aware of adult education:
Kay’s statements reflect the differences between states’ teacher certification requirements. While this was frustrating for Kay and led to her to leaving K-12 teaching, adult education benefits from the strict requirements since many adult education teachers received their initial training through this state’s K-12 teacher preparation. Kay continued speaking about her schedule, and although Kay was originally looking for a full-time job in a K-12 system, she found she liked the adjunct schedule:

Well, I am 60 years old now, which is so hard to say. And [adjuncting is] a lot easier than teaching an 8 to 3 schedule every day. You know, I like the fact that I work—this semester I’m only working two nights a week and I typically plan ahead, but I typically work the day I’m teaching; I will fine-tune what I want to be doing that night and then make my copies. If I have to have anything for that night specifically, I will make copies, but in general it’s nice. It’s a nice schedule. It’s relaxed.

Kay offered a common sentiment among the participants; mirroring other research (Feldman & Turnley, 2004), she was seeking part-time work, so she was happy with the adjunct schedule. Kay found the part-time schedule to be relaxing and a good fit for where she was in life.

Parallel to Kay, Jenny too had a previous career in the K-12 system, but Jenny had recently retired and was looking specifically for a part-time teaching job. Jenny had been adjuncting at a local university teaching preservice teachers when she was telling her neighbor how much she loved working with adult learners. The neighbor, an administrator at Midwestern
Community College, knew about adult education and recommended Jenny explore part-time teaching in the adult education division. Jenny shared the story of how she learned about adult education from her neighbor:

I was retirement age, so that was fine. But I really wasn't ready to retire. And I had a neighbor who I [told] I always enjoy working with adults. And I actually worked at [Local University] with preservice teachers, and I thoroughly enjoyed that. He actually worked at [Midwestern]. . . He was a dean there, and he said, “Oh, you know what? You might really like teaching adult ed.” . . . That was wonderful. And I was kind of between the two, [Local University] and [Midwestern], and then I came to [Midwestern] and was able to work a little bit more there. You know, I love [Midwestern], and I am just going to give up the others and so that's kind of where I made my transition. [Local University] was a lovely environment as well. You work with college students that have a passion for being teachers, and that was great, but you know, I felt like [Midwestern] emulated a lot of the population that I had, even for special ed. If I didn't have IEPs . . . everybody has different needs because they all came in different entry points. I feel that that's a strength of mine, is being able to diversify a classroom and reach those learners. So, it was just a real natural easy thing for me to do, and I enjoy it.

Jenny enjoyed working with adult learners and was happy her neighbor recommended contacting adult education personnel at Midwestern. Originally Jenny was adjuncting at Midwestern and a local university, but after a few semesters, she decided to focus on Midwestern only, as the learners were more similar to those in her K-12 experiences. The similarity allowed her more opportunities to use her strength in differentiating instruction.

Similarly, participants Carrie and Ariel liked working with adult learners, and although they were not looking for adult basic and secondary education teaching positions per se, they were seeking a way to help the parents of their K-12 students improve their literacy skills to be more engaged with their families and communities. Carrie described how she felt as she read the job posting for the adult education adjunct position:

It seems, when I read [the job posting], intriguing. Something interesting and different that I had not tried completely. . . . And knowing that a lot of parents that I see, some of
them can't read. And . . . you’re telling those kids to go [home and] read with your parents. Well, their parents can’t read. To me, it’s very intriguing and interesting to be able to come here at night and teach these students, and a lot of them who are parents. So, then they have that in their back pocket to help them with raising their kids. I think once again I feel it’s a way I can help.

This is a reflection of Carrie’s desire to help the parents of the students in her K-12 classroom. She saw the irony of asking students to go home and read with their parents when Carrie knew the parents had varying levels of literacy themselves. Carrie continued offering her thoughts on how else she assists her adult learners and taking a second job along with her full-time K-12 teaching position:

The students are such a pleasure to work with. And I feel that I am helping them learn a skill that they need, not only maybe for a job, but to help raise their family. . . . [If] you’re going to have a second job, this is the best [job]. . . . I didn’t know what I was going in [to interview for]. I had never taught adults in a classroom like this. It’s very interesting.

Carrie reflected on the rewards of adjuncting in adult education as her second job and the pleasure experienced through helping learners improve their lives. Having multiple jobs can be challenging, and Carrie iterated not knowing what the position would be like when she interviewed, but once she was in the position, she saw how much she enjoyed the learners and knowing the concepts she was teaching would improve their home life and job opportunities.

Ariel, like Carrie, was looking for a way to help the parents of his K-12 students improve their literacy skills to be more engaged in their families and communities. He spoke of a turning point when he participated in an open house and observed first-hand the parental struggles of filling out free lunch applications.

Teaching adults was a game shift from seeing the needs and the struggles that the parents of the children at [Local Elementary] were having. They could not even fill out a free lunch form. Some of them did not want to fill out a free lunch form because they were afraid about their immigration status. We had those that double struggle. The principal guided us though that struggle we were going to face that night and all of us were
pressing really hard for those free lunch programs. The reason being, our school’s title would change from a regular school to a Title I school and as a Title I school we would get additional support for all of those kids that definitely needed it. We managed to push over our school to a Title I school with that campaign at that open house. At that point, where I was having that much interaction with these parents, they were lacking in education. Struggling at a job because they were undereducated, wanting an opportunity even just to learn English. And it kind of opened me up to there’s a need. . . . That’s when I started applying at [MCC].

The parents of Ariel’s K-12 students were in need of literacy skills to better understand the application for free lunch as well as information regarding the citizenship process, both of which occur in adult education. This experience led Ariel to search for a way to help not just his K-12 students, but their parents as well.

Each of the participants had individual reasons for why they applied when they saw Midwestern Community College’s job posting for an adult education adjunct. They were all looking for a part-time teaching position, but none of them really knew what adult basic and secondary education was until they began teaching in the program.

**Getting into the Groove: Prepared on the Career Journey**

In addition to degrees in education or their content area, all 10 study participants had several years of K-12 or community college teaching experience when they were hired; however, none of them had ever taught adult basic or secondary education. As was found in other research (Smith & Gomez, 2011; Smith & Hofer, 2003), the teachers learned the art and science of teaching adult education once they were hired through experience and a plethora of professional development requirements and opportunities. It was not uncommon for adjuncts to be hired right before classes started, as was the case with Lara and Jeanette.
Although Lara was an experienced K-12 teacher, adult education was new to her. Having been hired a short time before the start of classes, Lara compared some of her initial training to making a new recipe with her mom:

I think because I was hired very close to the start of class, a lot of the orientation [was] “Here’s what you need to know right now, and we’ll meet later and we’ll find time to give you more of the big picture.” That was a lot of hit and miss, because it's scheduling. You know, and prioritizing. And when I sat down, [Division Administrator] especially was, here's what I felt like. I felt like she was my mom showing me how to cook a new recipe. It felt a little like I was younger, but I was experientially here. I needed her to say it the way she said it. And she repeated, and she anticipated questions. She listened to questions. I felt a little dumb, because I'm pretty computer savvy, but I wasn't getting this one part for attendance, probably because I was going too fast in the system. She said you have to be very gentle with the system. If you click too many times in one place, watch the wheel. The wheel is thinking. It'll crash. We don't want to crash it. So, knowing that it's not probably going to be me all the time. It might be the system. Anticipating that could be a concern was helpful.

As an adjunct it is not uncommon to be hired just a short time before the start of the semester, as was the case with Lara. Lara was given an orientation to department practices, but because the semester was about to start, her orientation was brief and primarily included just what she needed to get started, with the promise of a more thorough orientation once the semester was underway. Once of the items important for Lara to know immediately was learner attendance entry into the adult education data system. She compared the division administrator instructing her attendance entry to making a new recipe with her mom. Lara needed to hear the directions even though she was computer savvy. She appreciated being told how to avoid crashing the data system.

Similar to Lara, Jeanette also remembered being hired shortly before the start of classes. She reflected on her process of deciding what and how she was going to teach her first class:

I think I was hired within a month before I started teaching, and so it took me some time [to figure out an adult education teaching strategy]. I remember poring over those standards and making sense of them myself. Kind of having an idea about how do I
categorize this or how do I group these standards to teach certain lessons? I also reflected on how were my textbooks in K-12 organized, and are those methods going to work within adult ed, or do I have to change those methods?

Both a blessing and a curse, adult education has content standards, curricula, and methods with which instructors need to be familiar, but no predetermined texts or required means of reaching student learning outcomes. Jeanette had been given a binder of adult basic and secondary education content standards and was using it as a guide along with her previous K-12 experience to determine how to manage her lessons.

Jeanette also talked about getting a tour of the facility and meeting some of the division employees who would be resources when she started. Jeanette compared her first semester of teaching adult education to the first year of teaching K-12:

I think that part of the preparation involved . . . getting a tour very early on of here's where everything is. Which of course is always helpful because just knowing where the copier is [is] its own thing. But then also a little bit of an introduction to staff and who to reach out to. I don’t have a problem reaching out to other people when I need help. I know that some people struggle with that, but I don’t. I’m a questioner. I’m just going to ask you whatever question I have. But I think that played a big role for preparing me for adult ed. When I reflect back, sometimes I’ll tell the story to other adult educators. My first semester of adult ed looks very different than what my current semester of adult ed looks like. And I think that’s partly from just being in the thick of it. Just like a first-year [K-12] teacher, their classroom looks different and their methods look different than a fifth-year teacher in any setting. And I think that part came from . . . just experiencing it.

Part of Jeannette’s preparation came from her confidence in asking questions and knowing improvement would take place as she gained experience and offered appreciation for having a building tour and staff introductions shortly after being hired. She noted that the staff introductions provided resources for knowing to whom later questions should be directed.

Jeanette also reflected on the reality that, as in most settings, experience in adult education improved her teaching. Similar to the findings of Bullough (1993), Macdonald (1999), and
Stylianou et al. (2013), who found teachers’ focus changed as they gained teaching experience, Jeanette was able to look back and recognize her instruction looked different after a few years in the department than it did when she was initially hired.

As Jeanette spoke of learning through experience, so did Bernadette and Ariel. Bernadette talked about experience being a good teacher and a resource book she had received from a division administrator:

I think just the experience is the best teacher. After you’re doing it for so many years, you finally get into the groove of how to make a class last and make it meaningful, you know, for those three hours. What to get worried about and what not to get worried about. I’ve done some reading, too. I don’t know specifically the name of this, but we have this blue book that was handed out to us about being an adult education instructor and so I read a little bit of that.

Bernadette’s comments illustrate her classroom worries decreased as she got “into the groove” and developed practices to keep classes meaningful.

Experience was also an important factor for Ariel. He reflected back to his first day of teaching adult education and a learner who was already in the classroom when Ariel entered that day:

I’ve had all the training basically on the job . . . So, even though I did receive my elementary and K-9 certificate for teaching bilingual students endorsement, from [this state] from [Local University], that did not prepare me or teach me in any way how to address the adults. So, it has been a learning experience from day one. For example, I learned on day one that I had [bitten] off more than I could chew. I arrived at my classroom an hour early. I thought my classroom was going to be empty, but when I turned on the light, a student was already there. He was equally as excited to get started. What I learned from that student, first of all he was elderly, he was already a grandparent, a grandpa. He wanted to be a lab technician and he needed the GED to become a lab technician. Which he did [earn his GED]. I learned from him that I did not teach the way they teach in Mexico on day one. There I realized that I had a new challenge. I had to learn that every student comes with a certain set of tools or problems in the past, that I needed to identify and adapt to, or help them change if it needed to be changed.
Ariel’s story illustrates how teaching adults is often different from teaching other populations. Motivation this enduring is not uncommon in the adult education classroom. It was refreshing for Ariel to encounter a learner with a similar level of enthusiasm on the first day of class as he was feeling. In addition to the enthusiasm, this story also demonstrates the need for adult basic and secondary education faculty members to be ready with a variety of instructional methods. Learners come from many environments and with a wide continuum of academic levels joining together in one classroom, for which instructors need to be prepared to develop.

Another common practice offered to new faculty was peer observation. Most new adjuncts appreciated the opportunity to see how experienced peers conducted class. Kay related how she observed two of her colleagues early in her adult education career:

When I first came, I sat in on several different teachers’ classes just to see how they did [things]. It was really beneficial for somebody who had never taught in an adult classroom….Two people teach the exact same class that I teach typically and both of them teach in very different ways but the same content. I was able to observe both of them before I taught, before my classes started the very first semester. Actually, I only observed [Full-time Colleague] prior to starting [to] teach and then I observed [Adjunct Colleague] like the next semester and saw how he ran his classroom and it was really helpful. They both had taught adults for a very, very long time and they were able to share materials and anecdotes and just sort of [make] it a more human experience.

Kay’s comments indicated she observed two faculty peers who taught the same course, but in different ways, showing Kay multiple options for how she could organize her class and lessons. This experience bridged into material and anecdote sharing, giving Kay an even fuller picture of adult education.

Kay described how her colleagues shared materials and student stories with her as she acclimated to her new position:

They were able to relate to me personally how it is for them to teach adults. They talked to me about people who had been in the program for a long time and how they maybe had
started at the beginning. In our program you can repeat classes and there had been people who would you think would have been gone a long time ago. You just have to be patient with that student and, you know, not coddle them but there are some students that take a really long time to get through the program for whatever reason. Maybe it’s poor attendance or maybe they just like being here, you know. They like the surroundings and for whatever reason it’s taken them a long time, so that was unique knowing that maybe sometimes a person could get finished quicker than they did, but they just liked hanging around and being here.

Similar to findings in the literature (Macdonald, 1999; Vezne & Gunbayi, 2016), collegial conversations were an important part of Kay’s preparation. She explained some of the specific learner scenarios identified by her faculty peers. The stories provided Kay with some background regarding reasons learners may take longer than expected to complete the program.

Susan also reflected positively on the opportunity to observe how another teacher structured class and interacted with students:

I observed another teacher’s class and just seeing how she ran the class and some of the things. One of the activities she did came from a website that I had forgotten about but I had seen before. So that was like, okay, that’s good to remember and keep in mind to kind of bring up for students. Seeing the different way [the class] was structured . . . was helpful to me because that was when I first started out. It was helpful to . . . see how it was run and see someone doing something different, just seeing how she interacts with the class and things like that.

When she observed, her fellow faculty member used a website Susan was familiar with from her K-12 position but had forgotten. Susan looked forward to using the website with her own adult education class.

Other resources available to new faculty also helped them gain confidence in their new roles. It was new faculty orientation that stood out to Anika as her main source of adult education training. Anika stated: “When I first joined here, there was an orientation for the initial new faculty members. That's from the department. . . . I think that was it, specifically for adult ed.”
While the content standards and methods in adult basic and secondary education were similar to K-12, many of the other concepts were different. The standardized assessments, data systems, attendance policies, and reporting system were all items with which those outside of adult education would not be familiar and, therefore, were addressed during new faculty orientation.

While Anika talked about orientation, it was materials that stood out to Carrie. Carrie remembered the content standards binder and a book room providing a strong guide for her:

It was really nice when I first started that [the department] had all the standards together in that little book. That helped. Just having a piece to start with that first year was very helpful as a guide. [The department] had activities in there and stuff like that to get started. And having the books in the book room, very helpful too. So, having that to start with was a guide there. There were books in the book room, so there was enough that I felt I could put things together to make a very sound curriculum for the class.

Content standards are the scaffolding of adult education classes, and since Carrie’s background was in K-12 teaching, she recognized them as her guide, since the same is true of content standards in the K-12 setting. The adult education division at Midwestern Community College has a large selection of books available for use with learners, which is important, as adult education programs are not allowed to require learners to purchase texts or other materials. The more the college has available, the more choices faculty have for use with learners. This large book selection contributed to Carrie’s feeling that she had what she needed to develop “a very sound curriculum for the class” her first year.

In addition to the variety of resources and practices provided at the onset of the teaching position, all adult education faculty are required to complete annual professional development. This is a main source of preparation for teaching in the field, especially since it takes place after the teacher’s hire. As Jeanette explained, even though the hours are mandatory, there are many
opportunities available and, in her case, led to a full-time adult education-related job by providing professional development for the field:

It has been professional development from the beginning. I feel like in the very first semester, I started taking the mandatory courses within professional development, and then thinking of it as I have these many hours I have to do, so what am I going to find? When I was teaching in elementary school, I loved going to conferences and networking with other instructors, finding out what other people are doing. And so, when I came to adult ed, I was hoping that kind of same opportunities were available to me. And when I realized they were, I started taking advantage of those opportunities, like attending conferences, or attending PD sessions. Also, my administrator asked me to be a part of a pilot program that got me really invested into adult ed and the structure of it. And [that] now has just carried me through to a whole separate job within adult ed.

Jeanette had enjoyed professional development as a K-12 instructor and was hoping to find professional development opportunities in adult education as well. Since so few teachers come in with any kind of formal adult education training, most instructors get their adult education-specific training from the many professional development opportunities offered. Currently the requirement is for a minimum of 12 hours to be completed within each fiscal year. Formats and topics vary across a wide continuum of adult educator needs. Not only did Jeanette take advantage of numerous professional development sessions, but she was invited to a pilot in which her participation led to her being fully invested in adult education.

The benefit of the professional development hours also seemed to be recognized by other faculty. Marie shared the value of professional development, and like Jeanette and many of the study participants, engaged in providing and participating in more in-depth professional development projects:

Well, [I have been prepared through] professional development, attending conferences, being asked to work on state projects that have been lengthy, but like I said, that’s really given me time to make a shift and to be more comfortable in working with the standards
and more rigorous lessons. So, I think I’ve been prepared because they’ve been available to me.

Marie was one of several study participants who mentioned professional development projects requested by the state. These projects were primarily related to aligning content standards, developing curricula, and improving teaching practices within the adult education program at Midwestern Community College. Marie expressed how participating in these projects increased her comfort with the standards and led to the development of more rigorous lessons. Marie concluded her participation in these professional development opportunities contributed to her preparation to teach adult education.

In addition to the locally and state-provided professional development, Jenny also took graduate-level coursework to prepare her for adult education teaching and meeting her required professional development hours. Jenny talked about the variety of offerings for professional development and how faculty can find training that meets their interests and needs:

We have professional development every single year. Twelve hours. Which I like learning, so I have lots more hours than the 12. . . . What else? I’ve taken some graduate classes, and those have been helpful. A couple on poverty, which have been eye-opening. But again, kind of fit into what I felt I needed for my students. I’ve done the career college readiness planning, and now I actually get to be part of [providing] that training, which is exciting. There’s constant professional development, and there’s probably more out there that we possibly need, just depending on the direction that you want to go. Lots of roundtables at [MCC]. We have a lot of opportunity to grow professionally.

Jenny identified graduate-level courses as a means of preparing her for teaching in adult education and meeting her professional development requirement when she found topics relevant to adult education. She had taken graduate classes on poverty, a situation many of her learners experienced. Classes on poverty showed different perspectives for those who never experienced it, and for faculty, that new perspective often led to a better understanding of learners. Jenny also
mentioned faculty roundtables and many other opportunities to grow professionally that took place following the instructors being hired in the adult education program at Midwestern Community College.

Coming and Going: Adjuncting on the Career Journey

The participants applied for an adjunct teaching position for many reasons, but all the participants wanted a part-time teaching position at the time. While the flexibility of the schedule is what drove the interest for many participants, that same factor made it hard to collaborate with peers. The differing schedules held by each part-time faculty member, a concept closely connected to adjuncting at a community college, was described by many participants. All participants spoke positively of the part-time schedule and how well it worked within their lifestyle. In addition to fitting well with his schedule, Ariel mentioned wishing a full-time faculty position was an option:

I always dreamt of the day where it could potentially be a full-time position. Under the current economic conditions, I don’t see it happening. I see more and more colleges dwindling down their full-time positions and we’re seeing people who love to teach, run into multiple adjunct positions. I am fortunate and blessed that I am in a position where it’s so flexible, that I build my hours [in full-time real estate job] and I work from home.

Ariel’s comments illustrate his wish to teach adult education at Midwestern in a full-time capacity but also his belief the opportunity would not present itself since he saw many colleges turning to adjunct instructors to teach classes. Ariel iterated his good fortune in being able to dictate the hours of his full-time responsibilities to complement those of his part-time commitment at Midwestern.
Lara talked about her ability to come on campus and go straight to her classroom. She compared the situation at her full-time K-12 position where she felt the need to always be available to others with her adjunct position at Midwestern:

I like it because you see enough people in the halls. Other educators, other students. I’m here long enough [now.] I see students I’ve had [in class] before in my room and outside of my room. So, it feels like the community . . . feeling is building. Seeing colleagues, I’ve seen in the halls. I was on a committee with a few teachers I got to know better professionally instead of just a face and a name. So, the involvement is starting to feel more like a community to me. I’m comparing it to the day job. It’s not everybody’s always bugging you. I like that. I want to close my door and teach.

This illustrates the freedom Lara felt from her ability to come and go on campus as needed to fulfill her adjunct responsibilities. Lara’s relationships at Midwestern were developing as she saw familiar faces in the hallways and worked on a department committee. While Lara wanted to be collegial, as an adjunct she enjoyed being able to show up on campus just to teach without the other responsibilities that came with a full-time teaching position.

After previously teaching full-time, Jenny understood the pressures of the profession and reiterated the flexibility gained from the adjunct schedule:

And then [adjuncts with full-time jobs elsewhere] run in, they do their thing, and they come out. Again, having that flexibility in my schedule of this being after retirement. I say this is a perfect job for somebody after you retire. It’s just got all kinds of bonuses if you don’t have the stress of a full-time job and you’ve gotten the training from the K-12 system. We’re really trying to emulate that pattern in the adult ed world. I feel like we kind of have the best of both worlds.

She considered herself to have the “best of both worlds” in that she taught part-time and felt well trained due to her K-12 teaching experience. Jenny reflected on the adult education world emulating the K-12 pattern through the use of tightly aligned content standards for instruction.
Jenny also commented on the lower stress of a part-time position and how well the adjunct schedule fit with her retirement lifestyle.

Scheduling was also an important reason for Kay to stay at Midwestern. She stated a number of other factors that also influenced her desire to stay in the part-time position, including the freedom to request different class assignments:

I really enjoy the schedule. That’s probably number one on my list that it’s a really good schedule. And I really enjoy the people who I teach with here at [MCC]. It’s a very supportive group. Everybody is willing to help each other and it’s just a good environment to be in. . . . The pay is good. It’s not great, but it’s good. I have an opportunity to . . . help with [adult education] orientations on campus. I typically present at a conference that happens in September. I’ve presented more times than I haven’t presented. . . . at least four times. And . . . if I want to teach something different I can. If I don’t want to teach Level 5-6 I don’t have to. I can sign up to teach a different class if I wanted, so there’s some freedom there. It’s still a fun place to be.

Kay’s comments illustrate the variety of options adjuncts have available to connect to the division in addition to teaching, including facilitation of learner orientations and conference presentations. All learners attend an orientation co-led by an administrator and a faculty member. The orientation gives learners a chance to find out more about the adult basic and secondary education program at Midwestern and to get answers to their program and high school equivalency-related questions. Kay also presented at the fall conference. Division and area adult education faculty noted that they look forward to the conference as an occasion to present or attend and connect with their peers. Lastly, Kay appreciated the ability to select different courses to fill her instructional load.

Bernadette believed the flexibility of an adjunct schedule to be advantageous because she liked not having to work every day, but she also acknowledged flexibility could have a downside if classes were canceled due to low enrollment:
I think it’s the flexibility, the variety, I think it is the perfect field for somebody who is a little bit older or even a working mother who needs some more flexibility with the time. You’re not committed to four days a week. You could do two days a week if you want. You could do a morning if you want or you could do an evening. There’s that flexibility. But on the downside, you might not teach a class if classes don’t fill. So, if you need that money, that’s going to be the downside because you could get a class canceled. [Midwestern Community College] has it nicely set up where you have seniority, so you can pretty much be guaranteed. But in the beginning, when I first started, I think there was a semester where I only got like one class or something like that.

Bernadette explained she finds the variety of available teaching times appealing as a midlife working mother. Classes are offered in the division primarily Monday and Wednesday as well as Tuesday and Thursday, morning and evening. This type of scheduling provided flexibility as the teachers could insert their work hours into their other life commitments. Bernadette also addressed the fear of class being canceled for low enrollment is a real concern, especially for a newly hired adjunct. Once a faculty member has ascended into department seniority, losing a class becomes less of a worry, as the higher seniority faculty member usually has the option of bumping a lower seniority member from a class assignment.

A downside to the flexibility was mentioned by several adjuncts in the context of trying to schedule mutually convenient times to collaborate with peers in the department. Lara started out on a committee to revise department common assessments but found that since she taught full-time during the day and then was an adjunct at night, scheduling meetings that were convenient for all the committee members was a challenge. This was exacerbated because faculty on the committee had different teaching schedules. Lara described the scheduling barrier:

We were looking at the common assessments for reading. I just didn’t have enough time. We were having trouble scheduling when can we meet next, and I felt like I was holding everything back, and then I’m doing the STAR training, and that’s taking extra time. I said. “It’s not that I'm not interested. And maybe at another time I’ll jump back in if you
want, but right now, you guys go. I’m slowing things down.” But that felt like the kind of
group that I like to do. . . . We all had different perspectives and experience to add to it.
. . . Working with this committee for these reading tests, I was sad to let it go, because
that was probably something I want to keep doing if there were more than 24 hours in a
day.

Lara described the challenge of bringing several adjunct faculty members together to work on a
project. In this case, the team was collaborating on revising the department’s common reading
assessments. The learners’ reading assessments are used to inform classroom instruction as well
as learner placement and course promotion. These faculty-driven committees benefit from the
variety of perspectives and experiences that adjuncts bring to the table, but they are also
challenged to find mutually convenient times to meet. Lara expressed her dismay in having to
give up the committee for the present time.

Like Lara, Jeannette found the adjunct schedule was sometimes a barrier for peer
collaboration. She shared that some instructors were able to make it work, while for others their
schedules were just too tight, leaving them with only enough time to teach and then leave
campus:

I like teaching at [MCC], partly because of the people. I think I found two loves. I found
teaching adults is what I like to do. I also found . . . in comparison to my elementary
years teaching, the environment is a little bit different. I think part of it is because of the
nature of being part-time at [MCC]. So people are kind of coming and going, as opposed
to . . . when I was teaching K-12. . . . And in the adult ed world, I think there are people
who are willing to work together because they have this common cause, and then there’s
other people that [because] this is a part-time job, I’m just going to do what I need to do
and leave. And so that can be a little challenging as far as collaborating when you want to
find out what’s going on with other people and what they’re doing.

Jeanette saw the frustration of trying to collaborate from the other side. As an adjunct, she had
participated in many of the in-depth projects recently tackled by the department. She understood
the time constraints of those working additional jobs but found collaborating effective and
wished more department faculty were able to participate in projects. Jeanette talked about the development of peer groups to support the members since the adjuncts tend to be coming and going from campus on different schedules:

Then you find those people [who are able to collaborate] and you kind of form your own little group of people you know you can reach out to for support. And I feel like within adult ed, that’s really important because we’re all, a lot of us are part time. With this idea that we’re coming in just for our night class at night. You know, 6:00 to 9:50 and then leaving. Who do I reach out to when I do want something or when I need something, or when I have this issue in my class or when I want to change something and I don’t know how?

A general concern regarding adjuncts is the level of support they are provided as well as the level they perceive. Jeanette reflected on finding a group of colleagues with whom she related among the coming and going. She had developed a peer group to whom she reached out with her questions, which was significant because finding supportive colleagues and administrators was paramount to the wellbeing of adjuncts.

Jenny also discussed the development of colleagues in relation to the part-time schedule. Acknowledging that often the adjunct culture is to leave right after teaching class, Jenny talked about the growth of a peer relationship and how it made her feel:

I’m working with [Jeanette], who is on fire with all that [curriculum and methodology]. It’s really fun to work with somebody who says, “Hey, I found this new thing. Do you want to try this?” Or I’ve got something that I found, I can say, “Hey, do you want to try this?” It’s kind of fun. It’s not just going in and being an island and teaching your class and leaving. And I know that can happen as well because in an adjunct population, it’s very different than the K-12 when you have planned together. . . . It’s just very different in the adjunct world.

Jenny’s statements take Jeanette’s comments regarding adjunct colleagues a step further. Jenny reflected on the lack of arranged joint planning time with adjunct colleagues compared to the
structured planning time in K-12. She was appreciative of the motivation and knowledge of a peer with whom she intentionally scheduled collaborative lesson planning.

Jenny offered that the adjunct faculty workroom was a positive place to develop some of these relationships. She explained how instructors meet in the workroom:

It is different when you can hang [out] in the workroom and do your work and see people coming and going and talk to people about things. . . . Everyone’s in and out in the adjunct world. You know, everyone will kind of meet in the workroom and do things, but it’s less permanent because obviously we pick up. We go. We don’t have, like, a permanent sense there. But it’s just different. It’s not bad; it’s just different.

Highlighting the importance of a dedicated shared adjunct faculty workroom, Jenny mentioned talking with her peers as they came in and out throughout the day. She explained how adjuncts worked and hung out in the space but also a lack of permanence as faculty packed up and left. She went to say the feeling was not good or bad, just different.

Jeanette also characterized the faculty workroom as a positive and productive place to work, but like Jenny, Jeanette described it as bustling during certain parts of the day and less so at other times, as those who used the room came and went about their day:

I think that in general it’s a productive place to work. It’s huge, first of all, which I think is great for the number of staff we have. And technically, we have two of them if we needed them. I think that the people that you generally find in there, it’s a very positive atmosphere. However, I think it can also be a little lonely, depending on when you’re there. If you’re there a half an hour before class, you’re going to find a lot of people there. You generally don’t find people there between the hours of one and four or one and five because people have got their other job that they’re doing, or they’re just not there. I would say in general it’s a pretty positive place. There are some people that I feel like go there because they want help with things. . . . I think also that it’s just a common area, too, where there’s resources there. So, it’s like the watering hole in the desert. Right? Everybody has to come there eventually for something, so I think that it’s a productive place and generally positive.
The analogy of “the watering hole in the desert” provided by Jeanette is an apt descriptor of the faculty workroom. Faculty tended to utilize the available resources from staplers, hole punches, and folders to computers, printers, and large tables for spreading out papers. These resources were available around the clock, so the faculty workroom was well utilized and the attitude inside was typically positive.

It seemed that although the part-time nature of the job is why all the participants wanted this teaching position, it also made building relationships and collaborating with peers challenging. Spending time in the adjunct faculty workroom along with working on department projects were two ways faculty relationships and collaborations developed.

If Only I’d Known: Surprised on the Career Journey

The participants had a variety of areas they wished they understood before starting their adult education teaching positions or items that surprised them after starting to teach in the department. These ideas ranged from planning time, to awareness of reasons learners did not finish high school, to how learners’ stories would impact them.

Marie and Ariel were both surprised by the amount of time needed for planning. Marie explained developing effective lesson plans and grading papers in a manner leading to improved learner outcomes took longer than she anticipated:

I think to do it effectively I wish I would have known and not been so stressed out that it does take a couple of years to really work through your lessons, tweak them . . . to see how students respond. What your assessments are. Did they match your intention and your goals? I wish I would have known too, there’s a lot of time spent [grading papers]. I will grade papers if the class is large three or four hours [a night] at least because I do look at every word and make suggestions, but I do see at the end of the semester better writers. Even though I’m like a pretzel at the end of the night. I wish I would have known that it’s more than the time you’re here. You do homework. You’re always looking to better things.
Marie’s comments reflect the reality that much of a teacher’s job takes place outside the classroom. Marie spent untold hours developing lesson plans and assessing assignments with the goal of guiding learners toward desired outcomes.

Ariel spoke of the changes that have taken place in adult education over the last several years and how he was impacted. Ariel described the need for more planning time in light of the revised GED test and the expectation for faculty to teach standards-based curriculum:

What do I wish I had known? Probably that planning was going to be a whole lot harder than elementary education. Probably that your office hours are not enough. That’s something I probably would have wished I had known. I’m always constantly planning, constantly building, constantly changing. Nothing can stay static because the culture and the expectations are constantly changing for the students for testing and for us for teaching them. So, for me I wish I would have known that the GED was going to change halfway through my third year and that we were going to have to start teaching in a different way, but nobody could anticipate that. . . . Now that I’m in it, I’m in it to win it. I’m sticking to the plan.

While Marie and Ariel wanted more information regarding planning, Kay described discovering the many reasons learners may not have completed high school and how that has helped in teaching adult education:

I would say that I think my opinions have evolved working here because I had never worked with adult learners prior to working here. I went in only having taught . . . mostly high school was my job. Some of my high school students had adult responsibilities but they were still just teenagers, and so working with adults has been a lot different. It just was way different than teaching high schoolers. . . . Well just more from a standpoint of understanding that there are countless reasons why somebody didn’t finish their schooling, just understanding that in general, whether it was a young girl who got pregnant when she was in high school or it was a young man or young woman who had to quit so that they could help support their families. If they are children of immigrants and they weren’t educated when they were in their home countries, you know there are just a lot of different reasons. And finding out those reasons and then sort of compartmentalizing that for myself has helped.

Kay shared that working with adults was different from the high school population with whom she had previously worked due to their higher level of responsibilities beyond their education.
She found it helpful to hear the reasons for learners not completing, including becoming a parent, supporting family, and not having an opportunity to attend school in their home country.

While from Kay’s perspective working with adult education learners was very different from her previous experience, Jenny saw many parallels between learner groups. Jenny described the similarities:

I really don’t know other than our adult students are much more like our younger students in most ways. They all want respect. They want to be esteemed. They want reinforcement. They want to be comfortable. They want to learn. I guess the neat part is that all of the students at our college, 99% of them, want to be there. So that’s a different piece, too, which is really nice.

Jenny focused on the affective needs of learners and observed that both groups desired respect, esteem, reinforcement, and learning opportunities. She also believed a high percentage of adult learners want to be in school.

Jenny spoke specifically about the demographics of the adult basic and secondary education learners in her classes and being surprised by the compliance of the learners mandated to attend class as part of probation or other legal entity:

I guess what surprised me is some of the students that did need to be there. The small percentage that’s there because of probation or having to be there, just how amazing they are. And there’s very few and far between issues that we have with students, but they don’t usually come from the students that have to be there. . . . The ones I’ve had have been very receptive, and they’ve been surprised at the freedom of how to be treated like an adult at the community college level.

Some learners involved with the justice system are required to enroll in classes and earn a high school equivalency credential. Jenny expressed surprise at the compliance and positive reception from learners mandated to attend class. The few classroom management issues she experienced were not from those required to attend, but from other learners. Jenny was also surprised by the growing number of learners in her class with special needs:
I have more students in my class this semester than I’ve ever had, so that’s surprising me. So, asking more questions. It’s a lot of my students. My class is 17. There are six of them that either should have had IEPs when they were in school or three of them actually do. Two actually have accommodations, formal letters of accommodation. Two of them totally need it and don’t have them, but that’s their own choice, at this point. They haven’t done it. And then another man has just been out of education for so, so, long. Totally working on changing his life around, and so he's got a lot of special needs, but there's no paperwork or anything for him. This has probably been the semester that I've seen more and more needs than I've ever seen before.

Her current class had more learners in need of formal accommodations than in past semesters. However, prior to teaching at Midwestern, Jenny was a special education teacher in a K-12 setting, so she was well equipped to support these learners. Additionally, the college has a responsive department for disability services.

While some learners just needed a review as preparation for a high school equivalency exam, Anika was surprised by the low level of learners in the program:

The type of students we get initially, in level one, it was kind of surprising for me to see students not knowing the multiplication table. Those type of things were surprising for me. Students who couldn’t really add well or subtract well.

Anika did not expect to have learners in need of instruction on the basic facts. It surprised her to have learners in class who were not fluent in basic addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. The adult education program has leveled classes, so the learners to whom Anika was referring were in the beginning class levels. Beginning and intermediate-level classes focus on skills and strategy building, while classes increase in academic content and rigor, with the highest level intended for learners who have mastered basic skills and are ready to learn additional content in preparation for the high school equivalency exam.

Jenny was also surprised by the lower level learners, but it was their enthusiasm for hands-on activities that led to her surprise. Jenny described not wanting to offend her learners by
Having them participate in activities perceived as too elementary and how she learned by listening to them:

Sometimes I’m reluctant to do some activities thinking that my adults might be offended by them. Like, this is too elementary. I brought in all my measuring cups because I learned a lot of our students don’t cook with measuring cups or teaspoons. They actually do everything by hand or how something looks or how something tastes. I asked them how it works for them, and they said sometimes okay and sometimes not. So, I brought in the measuring cups and I was going to bring in water and everything that went with it, but I didn’t because I thought, oh, they’re not going to want to take a measuring cup and put it in water. As we were talking about them, I would be demonstrating, and they would have them all on their table. One of my students said, “Miss [Jenny], can we pour some water into these?” It was just so funny to me. I had thought they wouldn't like that. . . . The next day I brought in four big bowls. I stuck them all at their tables and it turned out to be an extremely successful lesson, but had I not listened to my students or they had [not] felt comfortable to say in front of everybody, can I pour my water bottle into these cups? I learned a lot from that, and now I do that lesson with water bottles and big bowls to pour them in. I think that’s just an example of the kinds of things when we listen to our students, we make better lessons.

Being considerate of their feelings, Jenny was hesitant to have her learners pouring water as part of a lesson on measurement. When a learner asked about pouring water into the measuring cups, Jenny offered to bring water bottles and large bowls for everyone to pour water during the next class. Jenny was excited at their engagement in the activity. The respectful environment of her classroom was also validated by the learners’ willingness to make the request.

Another area of surprise to the participants was the attendance and retention patterns of adult basic and secondary learners. Jeanette was personally troubled by the sporadic attendance of some of the learners in her classes and shared what she was told by a colleague:

[The advice from a colleague] was don't take your students’ lack of attendance or lateness as personal. The extension of that being they have adult lives just like you and I do. That is the reason they’re not coming most of the time. If it’s not that, their lack of engagement isn’t always about you. I think at the very beginning, probably my first year in adult ed, I really took that personally and I really took that hard.
The topic was discussed in new adult education faculty orientation, but because it was so different from other educational settings in which faculty had taught, it did not resonate until they had taught a semester or two getting to know their learners and their backgrounds. Some of the scenarios for missing class were unavoidable, but sometimes it was also an opportunity to teach learners to explore options they had not considered, like asking the doctor’s office if appointments were available at a different time of day to not conflict with class. Some of the knowledge taken for granted by faculty could be incorporated into classroom instruction.

Bernadette shared Jeannette’s concern regarding learners not regularly attending. She explained she thought she was losing learners due to her teaching style until her colleagues shared the common attendance pattern of adult education learners:

With adult ed teachers, you tend to lose your student population. You start off with a high number like 26 or something like that and then sometimes you end up with 15 or 10. So when I first started as an adult ed teacher, I was like, what the heck is going on? I just never knew that that could happen. Part of it was my teaching style, but part of it also was the nature of adult ed students. So, once I got to talk to these teachers [Full-time Colleague] and all the other teachers to compare, I found out that what I was doing was really no different and that it was not necessarily me. It was the nature of the beast. They also experienced the same thing, every single one of them. So that was great. Greatly beneficial for me. Otherwise I probably wouldn’t have stuck with it. I wouldn’t have stuck with teaching because I would have thought, I’m a terrible teacher because I keep losing my students. But it’s not necessarily you.

While Bernadette admitted her teaching style could still play a role, she was relieved to hear from colleagues regarding adult education learners often facing attendance barriers related to transportation, childcare, and employment.

Related to attendance and the reasons learners were not always able to prioritize their education, Lara realized the lives learners lived outside the classroom influenced everything
going on in the classroom. Lara described a learner she thought would be a leader in the class and how that experience changed her thinking:

I was surprised that there were, there’s a couple of faces in my mind right now. All you know them by is scores at the beginning. I’m like, oh, this person is going to be my go-to. Like, help us understand, get us there, break the ice. And then she would not come very often. She had some depression issues. I think she had a newborn also. I thought this was going to be a great moment for her. I had forgotten other people have other things going on that are maybe of greater importance. . . . Now I’ve started looking at the roster, the details of who’s in the class, just so I can be aware that these people might be going through things. A general, at least, awareness of why are you in here? What got you here and what is your attitude about school going to be and what are you going through outside of school? That human level. That at the first term, I was like, I got content. I got assessments. And they weren’t human to me yet. That made a difference, I think, that last term.

Lara discovered the student had a newborn and perhaps was dealing with depression as well.

This reminded Lara of the responsibilities adult learners have outside the classroom and how much those commitments impact the classroom. The experience taught Lara to look at learners more holistically and not just as scores on paper.

Like Lara, after she acknowledged learners’ lives outside of class, Carrie made changes to how she assigned and referenced homework. She explained moving from calling extra assignments “homework” to calling them “extra practice”:

I always thought homework was really important. You should go home and do homework. At least some practice. But with our students, so many of them working full-time jobs, family. I realize that that’s not always a good idea to give them homework because there's no time to do it. And then they feel guilty, and the last thing we want them to do is feel guilty, because then they may not work as hard or they may not even continue because they feel guilty. So, a lot of times I leave it up to them. You can take this as extra practice. You can do it if you have time. . . . I think that takes the pressure off of them. . . . It depends on their life situation that’s going on as to how much. I think it eases up, like, oh, it’s not homework, it’s just practice if I want it. It seems to help. I think just making sure that they have a chance sometime[s] to share their stories, because that makes them more open and they seem to work harder and longer in class, too.
Carrie found the change in semantics alleviated guilty feelings, but still promoted assignment completion when possible. Similar to Lara and Carrie, Jeanette was influenced by what her learners shared with her. Jeanette spoke of the deep personal impact of her learners’ stories:

I wish I would have known or realized how my students’ stories and experiences with education would mold my thinking about the K-12 system in general, or about education in general. And how impactful their stories would be on my personal psyche, on my teaching practices. I thought of it more as a job, and now I feel . . . “calling” is too strong of a word. Adult ed isn't for everybody. Adult ed is for a small portion of people. And I think that you have to be willing to listen to your students and try to put yourself in their shoes as much as possible. And then know that that might affect the way that you teach or the way that you do your job, and it should affect the way that you teach and the way you do your job. . . . I guess, and . . . the impression my students would make on me as a person or how much of the world would be opened. Not opportunities, but . . . maybe this has to do with my age, but how much more open-minded I would be. How much my students have taught me to be even more open-minded than I already thought I was.

Teaching adult education opened Jeanette’s mind even more than it was previously. The stories shared by her learners narrating their educational experiences and, more generally, their lives, impacted her personally. This transformation reminded Jeanette that being responsive to learners with teaching practices is expected, but some faculty may not be ready to respond to learners’ life experiences.

Susan also was surprised by the influence of her learners as she described:

Just working with the students, seeing the dynamics and getting to know them has really made me want to stay in it. I didn’t realize how much I would love teaching there and working with these adults until I started doing it.

Susan highlighted a common thought among participants; she did not know about adult education until she started teaching in the program. Once Susan begin engaging with the learners, she discovered she loved working with the adult population.
Although the participants had moments of surprise and wished they had more information before they started, their concerns ranged from the practical to the profound.

Socialization into Adult Education

Participants described being influenced by learners, colleagues, and administrators. The most exciting experience for participants was the high school equivalency graduation ceremony. Participants were asked to share an artifact that represented their experience of socialization into adult education. Using photo elicitation, artifacts led participants to share additional information (Denton et al., 2018; Harper, 2002) about their socialization experience. A variety of artifacts were presented by participants. Participants shared photographs of themselves with colleagues from Midwestern Community College, books of journeys, a musical instrument, a file folder representing a rolling cart, a drawing, a word cloud, and a picture of a sculpture. The sculpture of the impossible triangle (see Figure 1), called a Penrose Triangle, is located in Perth, Australia. The impossible triangle reminded Bernadette of adult education learners. The impossible triangle appears to have three right angles, but when looked at from a particular view, it can be seen that the triangle is not a complete triangle. Two-dimensional triangles have 180 degrees and, therefore, cannot have three right angles. The Penrose Triangle is an optical illusion. The relationship Bernadette saw between the sculpture and her socialization experience reflected on adult education learners. She saw that even as learners grew and achieved their goals, each learner continued to be unique.
Penrose Triangle: Socialization through Learners

When asked to provide an artifact that represented her perspective on teaching in adult education, Bernadette described a Penrose Triangle. The sculpture in Perth, Australia, illustrates the impossible triangle. From one angle the sculpture appears to be a complete triangle, but from another angle one can see that it is not actually a closed triangle. Bernadette compared adult education learners to an impossible triangle:

I use this artifact to describe the students who adult education teachers teach. If you look at the returning adult ed student, at one angle, it may appear that they are fractured or broken and perhaps this is the reason why they were not able to complete their high school education. . . . It is our job, as adult education instructors, to make our students whole, metaphorically, a closed triangle. But these students will always be unique by the life experiences they have had, so even if we teachers can help these students, they will always be unique, a Penrose Triangle.
Bernadette’s comments reflect her thoughts regarding adult education learners from her perspective as a faculty member. Bernadette is a math instructor, so it is fitting she would provide a math figure in response to the artifact request. She compared learners to the impossible triangle by suggesting, even as adult education faculty strive to help learners achieve, all learners’ life experiences are different, and therefore, all learners will maintain their uniqueness, much like the Penrose Triangle. As the participants continue teaching in the field, their experiences with learners result in both rewards and challenges.

One of the most meaningful learner experiences for adult education faculty was the high school equivalency graduation ceremony held at Midwestern Community College every May. Anika shared seeing learners graduate was her favorite part of teaching in adult education:

It’s when we see the students graduate [at] the GED graduation [ceremony] and then they go to higher education. When they achieve their goals. When somebody comes back and tells us, I did it. I have my GED. I have this score. That is my favorite thing.

For Anika, seeing learners realize their goals was her favorite part of being an adjunct in adult education. Learners wear graduation gowns and the college president as well as the board of trustees participate in the ceremony wearing full academic regalia. Many adult education faculty volunteer to help put on the event.

Related to graduation, when taking the high school equivalency exam, Anika also spoke of college-bound learners seeking to earn scores high enough to be deemed college ready. College-ready scores placed learners into college-level coursework without placement testing. Anika described learners returning to share their high school equivalency math test results:

I have . . . from my level five classes, students graduate. When they take the test, when they pass the math part, they will come and tell me. Last class, I had one student, she had a 162 [on the GED math test]. I think if she got a 165, she could take the college courses.
She got 162. She was very hard working. I had one last semester also; her score was 159. When they come and tell you, I passed it and you helped me, that's very rewarding.

Anika also felt particularly rewarded when they thanked her for helping in the process. Anika mentioned learners trying to score 165 to place in college-level math classes and the positive feeling of passing the test, even when the college-ready score was not achieved.

Like Anika, Ariel thrived on knowing he helped learners succeed in passing the high school equivalency exam. Learner success has been identified as a teacher motivator in other studies as well (Huang, 2011). Ariel shared a story about a learner he had in class several semesters, who misled him as to why he was no longer in attendance:

The third semester, he was on my list, but he did not show up. The second day he didn’t show up so, I call him on the phone. “[Jasper]? You're not around and I don’t want you to get to the third day because then I have to drop you.” Well, he came in on the third day and he pretended to be really angry and he steps up to me in front of the whole class. “I came here to tell you; I do not require your services anymore!” I'm like, “[Jasper], you’re hurting my feelings.” and then he takes out the letter. “I passed all the exams!” He went on to get his lab technician certification and he does work at [Local Hospital]. Yeah, so for me it’s to see that change. For them to come back and so publicly announce I was the one who empowered them to do that.

It was important to Ariel to get Jasper back in class to continue toward his long-term goal of becoming a lab technician. The division attendance policy only allowed for three absences before a learner had to be dropped, so Ariel was contacting Jasper with the intention of reminding him of the policy and encouraging his return. At first Jasper was able to mislead Ariel regarding not being in class, but he then broke the exciting news about passing the high school equivalency exam. After earning his high school equivalency, the learner continued with his education, earned his certification to be a lab technician, and was hired at a local hospital.
Helping learners achieve their goal of attaining their high school equivalency was also rewarding for Bernadette. She described the positive feeling seeing learners graduate:

The satisfaction of realizing you’re helping people achieve a goal. At the end when we get to see them graduating, I mean, you can’t help it. I’ve been doing this for eight years and you can’t help but tear up at the end. When you see them graduate, that’s just such a good feeling. Any teacher, if you’re a good teacher and you really care, just seeing them, you feel like you’re making a difference. There’s a purpose. . . . It’s just that is satisfying to me.

As she thought about the magnitude of the goal to which she had contributed, it brought tears to her eyes. She knew her faculty position had a purpose and that added to her satisfaction.

Graduation also brought Kay to tears. Seeing learners at the ceremony was her favorite part of adult education because by the time learners were at the ceremony, Kay had already been interacting with them for a while. Kay was unique in that she was one of a few who facilitated new learner orientation in addition to teaching classes, so she had the opportunity to engage with learners from the beginning of their adult education journey to the completion at graduation. Kay stated:

My most favorite thing about teaching is when those students are at graduation. It is so supremely satisfying to see them. I help with orientations here at [MCC]. I help new students before they even decide to come to class and we talk to them at orientation about how exciting graduation is. Then when you have someone who actually goes through the program and sits in your class and they do their assignments and then they achieve their goal of getting their high school equivalency and they get to go through that graduation ceremony, well it brings me to tears every May when that happens. It’s very exciting.

Kay’s reflection illustrates the journey learners take in adult education. The beginning of the process starts with orientation in which learners hear about the program and have the opportunity to ask questions. The graduation ceremony is introduced at orientation so learners can set it in
their sights. Many of the learners are excited when hearing about the option to participate in a traditional graduation ceremony after passing the high school equivalency exam.

Due to teaching classes at the lowest level of the continuum, Marie had experiences similar to Kay’s. She too, engaged with learners near the beginning of their journey and reflected on the magnitude of the accomplishment as learners walked across the stage at the graduation ceremony:

I like to teach here. I think it’s very rewarding because, for instance, I had a student who started in level 2. She just came down the hall to let me know that she had just passed her GED. She had [Full-time Colleague for higher level classes, and in whose class she] started taking those [GED] tests. What an accomplishment to see through those levels, that it does work. It’s such an amazing [experience] just to be able to share in their happiness. . . .That is a big influencer, that I’m not, like, on an island by myself and the fact that you can see people at graduation time or just this young woman who went through all those levels, and she’s [at graduation]; that’s fantastic.

Marie’s statement recognized that everyone in the program was connected by a common goal. Instructors and learners are intertwined as learners progress through the levels. Some learners enter the program at the highest level, only needing a quick review as exam preparation, but many require more in-depth instruction for success due to high extents of interrupted education. Since Marie usually taught the lower levels of reading and writing, knowing the length some learners progressed after entering the program made graduation especially rewarding.

Being present at graduation as learners crossed the stage was the most talked-about reward, but Ariel also mentioned the group photographs as a way faculty and learners were reminded of those positive feelings throughout the year:

Everybody [is influenced by the graduation group photographs], a positive impact, one hundred percent. Because the students say if [former learners in the program] were able to do it, hopefully I will be able to do it too. The teachers are reminded that this is a numbers game. We want to fill up the wall with more [graduates]. We want to run out of
space and start on the other side of the wall or a column right below it, you know. I’m already waiting, where is the next picture going to go when we run out of space between two doors? But it is a numbers game and we want numbers of success. Not to pat ourselves in the chest, but to realize we are achieving our goals of helping others achieve more. And being on that wall, that’s just the gateway to helping others achieve more.

The wall of graduates to which Ariel is referring is a hallway filled with group graduation photographs. A group photograph of the graduates is taken after the completion of the graduation ceremony every year. The photographs provide encouragement to learners and are a point of pride for the program.

Participants also spoke of rewards regarding learner success in addition to those related to graduation. Anika appreciated the learners’ praise for connecting math to real-life scenarios and was motivated by learners thanking her for her teaching style:

[My motivation is] always the students’ success. . . . So, many students, when they come to math class, math is not their favorite subject, but many students have thanked me for the way I teach math. They felt like there was a connection, . . . like where to apply what they learn. Some of those things made me happy. I helped them realize the use of what they are learning. And students, some have a goal of getting a college-ready score [to place directly into college-level courses]. So that is kind of inspiring for us to do more for them. And I think some [learners will] . . . tell you, you did a good job. I understood better or more in your class. We learned a lot. So, some of those things.

Many learners entered the program with a fear of math, so Anika felt happy when the learners thanked her for connecting math to their life. The learners told her of their increased understanding of math concepts, leading Anika to feel inspired.

Like Anika, Bernadette also encountered learners afraid of math. Her goal was to make math simple for learners to understand and she felt good when she was successful:

I’m just there to lead them and guide them and help them understand the concept. I want to make math not a frightening thing for them. That’s my goal, to make it simple. To make it enjoyable. The thing that I do enjoy hearing from them, is when they come to me and they’re like, we were really afraid to take this class, but after we took your class, we
really like math. That really makes me feel good because then I said I’ve done my job. I made it easy for you. You understand it. And maybe it’ll encourage them to go further.

Bernadette felt rewarded when the learners shared how her instruction helped them like math. When learners understood math and thought it to be enjoyable, Bernadette hoped they would be encouraged to take additional math classes.

For Carrie the reward came when the learners left class feeling as if they knew more than when they arrived. She described how learners often spoke of being in the lowest level class:

[Teaching adult education is] a very . . . good experience. It’s rewarding. I don’t know always who goes on [to the next level], but I always tell them, if you leave class each day feeling like you know more than previously, then you know you’ve had some success. Because a lot of times they’re like, oh, I’ll never get my GED. Even if you don’t get your GED, have you learned something to help you in life? I hope they get their GED. I’m [teaching] the bottom [level], so I don’t always see the results.

Carrie described the reality of not always knowing the successes of learners beyond her class. While she hoped they would earn their high school equivalency, she recognized that some of the learners would not and wanted them to feel they had always gained something from class.

Remarks from learners were also rewarding to participants. Marie illustrated an experience in which she felt validated by a learner’s comments:

Today they took their final and we reviewed this week about writing because there’s a writing assessment too. In the pre-test you did not have formal structure and intro, details, conclusion. And so today it just validated what we did this semester. I had a student when she was leaving, she said, “I did exactly what we practiced,” and she said it was really good to know that because I didn’t know that when I started. So I said, “Yeah, you can’t show up to a test like you don’t know these things.” I always say it’s like a zombie reader. You do know these, now you have to visualize them and what did that look like? So that was great validation today. It was good to hear and too she’s a non-native English speaker, so good to see her come a long way.

Learners did not have to know parts of an essay in the pre-test, but during the semester, they learned how to use the formal essay structure. After taking the final exam, a learner who
demonstrated her ability to use the formal essay structure complimented Marie for her role in teaching the concept, and Marie felt validated by the kind words of the learner.

In addition to feeling rewarded when learners were successful in other ways, the participants also were pleased when the learners recognized how lessons were applicable to their lives. Carrie described a project relating to characters in the text:

I think one of my favorite projects to do with the adults is after we’re reading a novel, for them to pick out one of the characters and to be able to pick out the qualities that that character has and give evidence to back up that quality if they think that that character is very brave [for example]. What did they read in the text to support that? And then for them to think about themselves, and what traits they have are their strengths. How that would help for employees when they go to [a job] interview? Keep those traits in mind and remember to promote those during the interview. More [than] likely, they go to an interview and they’re going to be asked, “Why should I hire you? What do you have to offer that others don’t?” So, to try to bring the novel character in and relate it to their own. That's very cool.

Carrie’s experience illustrates another objective of adult education which, in addition to college readiness, is to increase learners’ career readiness. Through character development in texts, Carrie illustrated how learners could reflect on their own strengths and convey them if asked during an interview. Carrie felt positive when the learners were able to relate the text to their own strengths and the job-seeking process.

The learners wanting to increase their career readiness was also what Lara found rewarding:

[Students] want to learn and they learn quickly, I think. [Lara’s] going to tell us the things we need to know. . . . When you say “When you’re doing a job interview, it’s really a good idea, to . . .” they’re on the edge of their seat. “Tell me. I want to know. You’re going to help me.” And when they get it, they’re like, “Oh, that makes sense!” I love that.
When Lara shared interview strategies and tips, the learners leaned in, recognizing the relevance of Lara’s words. Lara loved this learner engagement in class content and the moment learners “got it.”

Similar to Lara’s experience, Jeanette relished what she called the lightbulb moments and compared herself to a videogame character:

There’s always that moment in teaching when you can see the lightbulb go on in their head. I feel like I collect those. I feel like if I was some sort of videogame character, I would be collecting those little sparks of learning and putting those in my bucket for later. When it’s hard or when I don’t want to get up that morning . . . or I’m just not feeling it that day, that’s the bucket you have to pull from and go, these are the little lightbulbs. These are the successes. These are the things. I think I learned that early on in my teaching career in general and then in adult ed have just carried that through. I would say that in adult ed I find those moments easier to come by though, than in my K-12 experience.

Jeanette spoke of the learners’ successes that carried her through the day. She described the “Aha!” moments learners had when “You can see the lightbulb go on in their head” and likened herself to a character in a videogame collecting sparks of learning in a bucket. If there was a morning during which Jeanette was lacking motivation to get up, she drew from the bucket holding the sparks of learning, which kept her going every day.

Similar to Jeanette, Bernadette was rewarded by the learners’ engagement and “Aha!” moments. Bernadette also mentioned appreciating the gratitude shown by her learners:

I mean, it’s so true what they say. When you teach something and you get them engaged in [it]. They say it’s so hard to get students engaged in math, but then when they’re actually asking a question and they want to know why and then the lightbulb goes off. It’s very satisfying. That’s why I think teachers are teachers. Also, when the students show their gratitude in the adult ed setting . . . they come up afterwards and they’re like, “You’re such a good teacher.” Just out of the blue.
Bernadette described the difficulty of engaging learners in math but noted that when it happened and learners understood the idea, she was filled with satisfaction. She also mentioned learners approaching her after class to express their gratitude. These types of appreciation motivated Bernadette to continue teaching.

For Marie too, personal contentment came from learner engagement but more specifically when the learners experienced the excitement of researching new topics. Marie described sharing the story of Phineas Gage with her class:

I get excited about students getting excited. I really do. When I can't wait to get here, like we were just reading about Phineas Gage and they were like “Ahhhh.” I just love that shock factor that just really spurred them on to research different things. I get excited about them trying new things. So, to me that’s the best thing.

While teaching reading and writing, Marie used high interest nonfiction texts to engage learners. Marie recently shared the story of Phineas Gage with her class. His real-life experience of surviving an accident resulting in an iron rod being driven completely through his skull was high interest for learners. The complete surprise triggered by the Phineas Gage story led the learners to explore other ideas, which in turn was encouraging to Marie.

Although the rewards seemed to far outweigh the challenges, there were also challenges to teaching adult education. The two most common challenges the participants mentioned were inconsistent attendance and cell phone use during class. Jeanette commented on the challenge of inconsistent learner attendance:

Ironically [because it is so rewarding], the population is also one of the challenges because they are adults and they all have adult responsibilities. They have adult things going on in their life, and so taking that into account, while you can connect with them about those things, those things still come up and can be barriers for them to get to their goals, so that can often be challenging, too, because you think you’ve made this relationship, and you’re going on this pathway and then something happens in their life that stops them from going on the pathway.
Jeanette referred to the challenges of the population created by having adult responsibilities. Sometimes those responsibilities caused learners to miss class, creating barriers to reaching their goals. It is common in adult education classes for the enrollment to decrease as the semester progresses. Learners miss class due to schedule changes in their work hours, an ill parent or child that needs care, not having transportation, not having childcare, personal issues, etc. (National Research Council, 2012b). During orientation, scenarios related to these situations are discussed in order for learners to consider solutions; in the classroom, faculty also serve as real-time resources as learners encounter barriers to attending class. Even after connecting with them in class, Jeanette found some learners were unable to complete the semester.

Kay concurred with Jeanette, noting that “the greatest challenge is poor attendance. It really is hard for students to miss 3½-hour instruction and then come back and know what’s going on.” Kay described some reasons for missing class:

You know they are absent for a myriad of reasons. They had to work. Their boss wanted them to work late or their boss changed their shift or their car broke down. We hear everything, or they just didn’t come to class. They don’t give you a reason. They don’t have to give us a reason either but it’s nice to know.

As Kay pointed out, reasons do not have to be given when class is missed, but learners often want the instructor to know the reason to convey their level of motivation. The most motivated learners will often try to get a message to the instructor regarding the reason for their absence. The teacher and the program like to know the reason for the absence when possible, as the reasons could lead to programmatic changes.
Marie agreed the greatest challenge in adult education was the lack of regular learner attendance. She also noted how absences due to employment situations were often out of the learners’ control:

Greatest challenge? I think sometimes having a student attend regularly. I think that makes a really big impact and it’s not always in their control, you know. I’ve had a lot of students with work, the employer’s not flexible, randomly changes their hours, so here they are you know on course, but it’s out of their control. So that . . . is a challenge if a student is repeatedly absent, to get them caught up.

The challenge from learners missing class due to work, as described by Marie, impacts teacher and learner alike. Learners fall behind when they miss class, then the teacher and learner have to work together to address the gaps. When the learners lack control of their schedule, it may be due to the nature of the type of work in which they are employed. These kinds of jobs tend to be scheduled by shift or hour and often the schedule is developed based on a need for particular coverage and may result in an inconsistent work schedule. In some sectors the schedule may also vary by season. Any kind of schedule variation may be problematic since adult education classes tend to have fixed schedules. Competing schedules put learners at a disadvantage, but the teachers know learners need to work in order to make ends meet.

Bernadette agreed with the other participants, but her comments revealed another issue connected to learners juggling work and school, lack of sleep:

The greatest challenge is just with those students who . . . The ones who are working third shift, but they want to be there. But they’re falling asleep in your class. They work the third shift. They came right from work. And within an hour after their class in the morning, they’re ready to fall asleep. And they have [good] intentions. They’re intelligent. I’ve had quite a few who are very smart. But it’s like, you know, there’s such a difference. I can tell when they worked because when they worked, they come to my class. Even though they’re smart, they’re not going to pick up the material and remember it because they’re lacking in sleep. Whereas when they come the next day, when they’ve had a full night’s sleep, sharp as a tack.
Bernadette described how tired learners were after working a full shift and then coming to class. She recognized the difference in alertness between the times learners had worked the night before and those they had slept.

Another challenge mentioned by participants, but to a much lesser degree, was the learners’ cell phone use. When asked about challenges in adult education, Susan shared, “Probably the worst I get is they are on their phone. So, whenever I’m filling out stuff for observations about student behavior, I’m like, I don’t have any behavior issues.” Kay agreed that cell phone use can be problematic:

Cell phones are an issue and I have written in my syllabus that cell phones are not prohibited, but if it’s during the lesson I don’t want them to have their earbuds in and I don’t want them to be on the phone. If they need to take a phone call, leave the classroom to take it because it’s rude to talk on the phone while other people are trying to learn something. For the most part people adhere to that. They are really respectful about that. I do have some young men who sit in the back and want to be playing videogames on their phones and I just walk by and say, “You need to put that away, or if you’re going to do that you need to leave the classroom.” . . . I figure they are adults and if they choose not to participate and they are not disturbing the people around them what really can I say to them? They are not achieving their goal.

Compared to lack of attendance, cell phone use in class was a much smaller challenge. While most learners complied with Kay’s request to not use a cell phone in class, she had a small number of learners who continued to use their phones for noneducation means. Kay tried to redirect the learners, but as long as their classmates were not impacted she did not push the issue. Ultimately it was the learners themselves who were the most impacted as they were not progressing toward their own goal.

Anika’s perspective was that some learners did not understand the big picture of the program and seemed daunted by the scale of their goal:
If I compare with a college education some students don’t feel the necessity or value of what they are getting. Like they think [because] these courses are free or they can take it any time, you know, that kind of approach. And for the other courses, you can demand them to do the homework or you can give them credit or if you do this, you have this much credit. For our type courses, that’s not there. Even if they do the homework or if they don’t do the homework, it’s not, you know? It’s not counted towards their progress. I mean, it is counted, . . . but not from progressing from one level to the other.

As Anika pointed out, some learners felt no urgency to complete the program, believing it will be available whenever they decide to continue. It is not uncommon for some learners to stop in and out of adult education several times before meeting their goal.

**Friendship, Collaboration, and Inclusivity: Socialization through Colleagues**

Colleague relationships were highly influential to adjunct participants. These peer relationships were also found to be highly valued in the literature (Macdonald, 1999; Staton & Hunt, 1992; Vezne & Gunbayi, 2016). All 10 participants had only positive comments to share regarding their professional peers in the adult education program at Midwestern Community College. Kay stated, “Everybody wants to be here. I don’t think anybody who teaches here doesn’t want to be here.” When asked further about the program and environment in which she taught, Kay responded:

> Colleague wise, perfect. I couldn’t ask for better teachers to teach with and we help each other out, especially the other two teachers that primarily teach the subject that I teach. We share ideas all the time. We share lesson plans. We share funny anecdotes that we find, so we work well together.

She described the relationship she has with her colleagues—in particular, the two who teach the same language arts, science, and social studies course as Kay. She explained they help each other by sharing ideas and course materials. Kay also liked to share funny anecdotes with
other faculty members. Regarding Pi Day, Kay stated: “I found all kinds of cartoons about Pi Day and I sent those off to my friends who teach math.”

Drawing on Kay’s statements regarding her positive peer relationships, when asked for an artifact, Kay brought a picture illustrating her experience in adult education at the community college. Kay explained:

I brought a photograph of me and two colleagues here who teach at [Midwestern Community College], [Full-time Colleague and Marie]. We co-led an adult ed [professional development] class at our [Adult Education] Conference last fall on how using children’s literature helps increase literacy in adults. . . . We’ve worked on many projects together. We’ve presented together many times and then we also worked on the curriculum rewrite together and also did the curriculum training to be language arts specialists together, so we’ve done lots of things together. Helped build a really solid friendship and community here at the school.

Kay described many activities that helped to develop positive peer connections. One of the relationship-building activities was creating and presenting a professional development session on using children’s literature with adults at a conference sponsored by the adult education division of Midwestern Community College. The peer relationships also grew from many other projects on which Kay worked with her colleagues, including other presentations, revising department curriculum, and participating in language arts specialist training.

Like Kay, Anika brought a photograph of her and two colleagues in the adjunct faculty workroom on campus when asked for something representing her adult education experience at Midwestern. Speaking about her pictures (Denton et al., 2018; Harper, 2002) encouraged Anika to provide richer descriptions of her experiences. Anika stated: “It's [Adjunct Colleague, Jenny], and myself. It's friendship. It was towards when [Adjunct Colleague] was retiring, I believe. It's friendship. This is in the faculty room.” Anika went on to describe another retirement gathering although she could not find the picture from the event:
There was another [picture]. I think we had more faculty members [in the picture]. Some of them were retired. I think [Retired Adjunct Colleague] was there. [Another Adjunct Colleague] was there, and then [Adjunct Colleague] and [Jenny] was there. [Full-time Colleague, too]. . . . That was at [Jenny’s] house. . . . Yeah, [Another Adjunct Colleague] was there too, and she retired. [Jenny] held a sendoff for her. I think it’s been nice. It’s very good. I think the people we have or we are hiring, they’re all very nice. I am basically myself not a very outgoing person, but I try to be part of it when there is some opportunity.

The significance of this event is that those gathered to celebrate included not only current faculty, but also faculty who had retired from teaching adult education at Midwestern Community College. Retirees keeping in touch with their colleagues and attending the events are an illustration of the strong relationships formed by faculty within the department.

As he spoke of the program, Ariel shared, “We know each other by first name, we treat each other as family members, and we are there for each other when we need a sub in a pinch. That’s what I like about the program.” As he continued talking about his relationships, Ariel described the “strong bonds” developed with department faculty and shared an experience to illustrate how they were developed:

The good [experiences] I relate with the last day of class, because it’s quite festive around here. Especially when it’s an evening class and it is a class where you have a very strong connection with everybody in the class and you happen to be [classroom] neighbors with your best friend. He too has a very strong [connection] with his whole class and these people decide to bring a lot of food at Christmas time. We were singing karaoke until probably almost midnight and then security kicked us out. We ate while we were learning. We did not finish early; in fact, nobody wanted to leave. So, we went to visit [Adjunct Colleague’s] class. We took our food and ate some of their food. We were singing karaoke and [Adjunct Colleague] was the video DJ. But it was a great time to build camaraderie . . . That was the year that we were changing from the old GED to the new GED. So, it was a lot of pressure for everybody. And a lot of those were celebrating that they passed the old GED.

These two faculty members had developed a strong friendship through teaching the same subjects, at the same time, on the same hallway for years.
Bernadette also spoke of the friendships between her and other department faculty. She described a difference in how she viewed her classroom environment compared to one of her peers:

The math teachers that I admire the most are [Adjunct Colleague] and probably [Another Adjunct Colleague], although she made life a little harder for me because she would always provide food and make everything so warm and cozy. I thought, “Oh my [gosh], I don’t do any of that stuff.” So, [for learners] it’s like to go from there to my class is so cold. Mine is very straightforward and cold, and she’s all warm and fuzzy. But as far as being a math teacher, I have a great deal of respect for them because of the way they explain things. I like [Anika] as well because she’s very warm and compassionate. I’ve gotten to know her pretty well. For me their friendship has been . . . it’s been greater than at any other places that I’ve been at to teach.

Bernadette respected the teaching styles of her peers and commented on how well they explained concepts to learners. Bernadette contrasted the perspective she held of her classroom being straightforward and cold with one peer who always provided learners with coffee and food in the morning and another who was warm and compassionate with learners. Bernadette concluded these friendships were greater than she had experienced at any of her other schools and described how they supported her during a challenging time in her life:

[Claire, the full-time faculty member] has been wonderful, as well. [Claire] and [Marie]. I shouldn’t exclude them because I was just thinking of math people. But I’d have to say with [Marie], when I was going through my cancer and everything, and with [Claire], they reached out and [Marie], it’s more of a personal thing more than anything else. [Marie] would put together these little care packages of homemade soup for me. She would also have little cards and little gifts and stuff like that. I mean, when she knew I was going through my cancer. I was losing my hair and everything, and she was trying to be as encouraging as possible. Giving me a hug now and then. I was just like . . . I was like . . . it was just amazing.

When Bernadette was diagnosed with cancer, she shared the unfortunate news with colleagues and found support at Midwestern. As her treatment progressed, Bernadette taught in the department as much as possible and continued teaching throughout her recovery. The learners and staff alike noted her courage. Bernadette shared that two faculty members in particular
reached out with encouragement. She was deeply touched when she received hugs, homemade soup, cards, and small gifts of comfort. This is significant as it illustrates the depth of the faculty friendships at Midwestern.

Along with friendship, the participants valued collaborating with and hearing the opinions of their colleagues. Jeanette valued discussion with her peers as a way of learning. She wanted to hear differing opinions on a subject and felt it was important “to talk to people who are like-minded, but also people who are not like-minded, so I can see the . . . other side of the coin.” Jeanette believed in the strength of multiple perspectives. She was open to the opinions of her colleagues. Like Jeanette, Jenny described a situation in which she wanted the opinion of her peers:

I guess justifying sometimes the feelings of, yes, this is what I think my students need and then hearing another teacher say maybe the same thing about a student. Like yes, I see that same thing. We need to do this. We need to empathize. We need to get to know [learners] because I don’t think they’re going to be open and ready to learn anything that we have for them if they’re shut down and they don’t feel that their environment is an open environment.

It was helpful for Jenny to get other perspectives, particularly when a learner was in a challenging situation. It was important to Jenny to provide a safe and welcoming setting for learners and she believed learners would be most successful in a nonjudgmental classroom. As a very compassionate instructor who believed in the power of a positive learning environment, Jenny sometimes appreciated validation from other instructors regarding learner needs.

The teachers are provided with standards, curricula, and two bookrooms housing a vast inventory of materials but have the freedom to create lesson plans using any text they deem appropriate, so a common topic of adjunct conversation was focused on asking how or with what materials a peer taught a particular lesson. When Jenny needed instructional supplies, she looked
“for materials that colleagues say are good.” She felt that the influence colleagues had on each other through material sharing was “a huge one” because the instructors helped each other locate texts “aligned to the standards that [they’re] trying to teach all the time.” This led to collaboration as the teachers willingly shared already developed lessons with colleagues.

Sharing materials between colleagues was so common and positively regarded in the adult education program at Midwestern that when asked to bring something illustrating Lara’s perception of adult education at the college, her artifact represented collegial sharing. She brought a hanging file because she did not want to bring her whole cart, but she described the rolling cart and how it depicted her experience in adult education at Midwestern:

I brought a hanging file because I didn't want to bring a big wheelie cart of hanging files that I actually use. One of the first things that struck me my first semester here was I was carrying bags over shoulders and I saw others just casually and professionally rolling a cart. I thought, “Oh, I need to start getting one of those.” When I got one, I started organizing what I had or thought I needed and realized there’s so much I could put in here. I can't; it's only so big. But I started talking to people like [Kay] and [Jenny] and asking what publisher, what resource do you [use] because I’ll try them. They gave me a lot of good direction about the vocabulary series that they like or the comprehension series that they like. So this just represents that collegial sharing. Yeah. The cart is . . . I don't know the measurements, but it's a cube with a lid and an expanding handle and rollers, so you can put it in your car and out. You can configure the things inside in the way you need to, so you’re not just, you know, one use. I have a box of writing supplies, books, and my own folders for everyday students’ information. And I think that’s helped me a lot.

When Lara began teaching, she carried her materials in a bag over her shoulder, but she soon saw colleagues using rolling carts. Lara thought the rolling carts looked professional so she purchased one. The rolling cart illustrates collegial sharing to Lara because soon after she bought her cart, she started reaching out to her peers for suggestions. For example, Lara asked her colleagues what texts they preferred for teaching vocabulary and comprehension. As Lara used her cart more, she organized it for texts, folders, and other materials. Lara found the cart to be
helpful because she could roll it through the hallways while working, and after class it easily fit in her car.

Susan gave a very specific example of being influenced by her colleagues. Recently she had been given two new teaching assignments. She described the assistance she received from two adjunct faculty members familiar with the assignments:

I’ve had a couple of teachers that have worked with me and they’ve talked about stuff that they’ve done. Like when I first started teaching the split class, I didn’t know how it was going to work, although I never truly had a split class until I took over for [Bernadette]. Otherwise my class has always been one level. I was nervous, like, how do I handle a split class, so one of the teachers, [Jenny], met with me before I started teaching it and showed me some of the stuff she did. Then before I taught the Level 5 class I’m teaching now, I was emailing somebody, [Bernadette], who is also teaching it and she was giving me a lot of the information, what she plans for it, her outline for the class, and how she runs it. . . . It just kind of made me feel more at ease when I started the class and I felt more comfortable when I got into it.

Susan felt more comfortable teaching in the split class scenario after speaking and planning with a peer who had successfully taught a stacked class. The split class situation to which Susan was referring took place when there was not enough student enrollment to run a class, so the class was merged with a similar class in order to run. When this happens, the combined result is referred to as a merged, stacked, or split class. It is challenging to teach in this scenario because the specific course outcomes for each class still need to be taught to learners enrolled in that class. Teachers need to be highly strategic as they are ultimately teaching more than one course at one time. The second situation was the assignment of a class at a higher level than Susan had previously taught at Midwestern Community College. Again, speaking and planning with an experienced colleague set Susan up for success and made her feel better equipped for the teaching assignments. By giving Susan “all of [Jenny’s] stuff” and telling Susan to “use any of this you want,” Susan felt a high level of peer support.
In addition to sharing information regarding learners and materials, Bernadette mentioned another benefit of talking with colleagues. Bernadette regarded sharing ideas between peers as a way to improve her practice:

Talking about it with instructors. Talking about what they do, that’s what I’ve been doing, actually. I consider sharing ideas with other instructors when we have our . . . roundtables. . . . So that's one of the ways that I use to improve my practice and teaching.

Faculty roundtables are held at least once during most semesters at Midwestern. The topics range across assessment, department policy, and methodology and are sometimes selected by faculty and sometimes by administration, but the conversation is always an opportunity for faculty to share their experiences and opinions.

Learning from her peers was also a desire of Lara’s. When talking about her experience in the department, Lara shared she was “looking forward to [teaching adult education] better and learning from others and meeting others that have done this. . . . I like the growth, the progress.” She hoped to explore ways to improve her teaching practice with her colleagues. Lara was an experienced K-12 teacher but wanted to learn more in the adult education setting.

Marie also spoke about colleagues with whom she routinely participated on department projects and presentations:

I never feel threatened asking them a question. I think that in turn when people ask me something I’m not guarded. I think working with them we bounce ideas off of one another, and we may not always agree . . . on how to go about things, but I think as far as I feel, we feel safe in discussing our viewpoints and reasons for them.

The adult education faculty have developed and revised both curricula and assessments, and worked on numerous other projects. Marie volunteered to participate in many of these initiatives, and through her participation, Marie developed a sense of trust with her peers. She noted that they may not have the same perspectives, but they do respect each other’s viewpoints.
Not only did these activities result in substantial advances for the department but also significant gains in faculty relationships.

Marie continued talking about the meaningfulness of working together outside of the classroom. She spoke about a training in which some faculty participated, that required traveling a couple hours from campus:

I always enjoyed when we would go down to [Campus Town]. I thought it was nice to get together for dinner and that was more informal. I think that goes a long way in not just being in the [training] class [together], you know people outside of class and you are curious about their family. You want to see how they are doing. I think that’s valuable to be connected.

Marie noted how faculty relationships grew during this training because the group stayed in a hotel and enjoyed dinners out together. During the dinners out, personal connections increased while faculty members got to know each other better. These closer relationships continued even after the training was over and everyone returned to campus.

As instructors are hired, administrators request current faculty to introduce themselves to the new faculty members. Many of the participants mentioned the support of Claire, the only full-time faculty member in the adult basic and secondary education department. According to Jenny, Claire offered herself as a resource. Jenny shared, “I just kind of made people my mentor [when I started] and when [Claire] reached out, she was like my go-to.” When describing adult education at Midwestern Community College, Jenny referred to the “amazing environment.” She continued:

And [Claire] plays a huge part in . . . [the amazing adult education environment]. She’s very good about checking in on everybody and seeing what she can do to support them, and if they need anything, she’s a great resource for materials. She’s a non-judgmental person. She’s open to everybody, and so [Claire’s] a great asset.
Jenny talked about Claire as resourceful, open, non-judgmental, and a positive asset to Midwestern. When asked about the most helpful advice she had received, Jenny shared it had come from Claire and was “listening to the students and go with what you need.” Jeanette also found Claire to be a helpful resource and described how Claire influenced her teaching practice:

That started as me going to [Claire]. That first semester or that second semester, me going to [Claire] and going, “Hey, my students are late all the time. What’s that all about? How do I do this?” And her going, “Oh, yeah, we all face that.” Being empathetic, but also here's something you can do to help that.

Claire provided suggestions but also reassurance that the situation was not unique to Jeanette. In addition to being a great resource, Bernadette shared that Claire “goes out of her way to always be inclusive, try to include everybody. . . . she’s just a friendly person.” Bernadette went into greater detail:

Claire has been very flexible. . . . She’s been really easy to talk to no matter what. I think she clicks with just about any age group. She’s always been really encouraging because every time [something] comes up, she’s like, you're going to do this [Bernadette]. You're going to do this. While we were doing that pilot project and she wanted me to do this and that. I’m like, “Why are you picking me?” I was really flattered by her confidence in me.

Bernadette had questioned her inclusion and was flattered by Claire’s belief in her abilities.

Marie also defined Claire by her inclusive attitude. She talked about working with Claire because they bounce ideas off each other:

[Claire] definitely has a welcoming attitude; she draws people in. She’s been just so easy to work with, we have a good time. We really do. We bounce ideas off of one another and she’s never afraid to include people, you know she definitely has a way of doing that, whether you're a willing participant or not. She does it out of wanting the best for you, I said [to Claire], “You’re like a pusher, but you push me to do things that are great.” So, it’s wonderful.

In addition to being approachable and positive, Claire provided an atmosphere in which everyone felt welcome. It was also an environment in which Claire encouraged instructors’ professional
growth. Marie felt empowered by Claire to expand her teaching practice. Positive responses to
mentors are also depicted in other studies (Lengeling et al., 2017; Staton & Hunt, 1992).

These adult education faculty at Midwestern concurred about the high level of support
received from colleagues and overwhelmingly spoke of the support and inclusive environment
provided by the only full-time faculty member.

Treated Like a Professional: Socialization through College and Division

The experiences of an adult education instructor look different depending on the setting
in which it takes place. At Midwestern Community College, the participants described feeling
respected and treated like professionals. They were treated like the other faculty and recognized
this was not the experience across the state. The participants were also appreciative of the
benefits received from being part of a community college and noted that their experiences were
overwhelmingly positive. Jenny described her experience at Midwestern:

I'm having a great experience. Yeah. I feel extremely blessed doing what I'm doing. I like
it. I tell my students all the time, education may not make you wealthy, but it gives you
options. And I always tell them I get to wake up every day and be here with you. I say I
get to do what I want to do, and encourage them that education is a value. I've had really
good experiences at [Midwestern]. I'd probably attribute it to great administration and
just the vision of the program and our population. I think there's a lot of things that
contribute to the great environment at [MCC].

Jenny’s description illustrates her excitement to come to work every day at Midwestern. She
loved working with the adult education learners and wanted them to know it. It was also
important to Jenny to convey the importance of education to learners. She believed the
administration, vision of the program, and learner population all contributed to why she was so
enthusiastic.
Kay felt positive about her experience at Midwestern and what was available to her as an adult education faculty member. She described some of what made the experience “great,” including the structure, resources, and building specific to the program as well as the college library:

At [Midwestern Community College] it’s a very structured adult education program. We have very good resources to pull from. We have a really beautiful facility to teach in. We have great technology to use in our classrooms. So, all of those types of tools are there for us and at our fingertips, and we have access to other online resources and we have access to a library here on campus that we can use materials from. That part is awesome. It’s great. We just have a really good system in place for teaching. . . . We have really good professional development opportunities here at [MCC]. The building itself is comfortable to be in. It’s very pretty and clean and pleasant, so it’s all good.

Kay’s comments are indicative of her appreciation of the program structure and benefits of being associated with a community college. The adult education department at Midwestern provides the faculty the standards, curricula, and common assessments from which to plan lessons. The curricula and common assessments are faculty developed and revised regularly by faculty, so a structure is in place through the design of the program. Classes are divided into math and language arts as well as by academic level. Within the last 10 years, the division moved from an older off-campus location to a new building on campus, giving staff and learners a message of being valued by the college.

In addition to the comfort a new building brings, the move to campus brought easier access to campus amenities. Each semester Kay takes her learners to visit the college library to hear about the available services and to check out material. She described a recent visit in greater detail:

All the employees in the library have always been really receptive. I try . . . every semester [to] take my class over to the library and the librarians do a quick how-to-do-research class for my class. I’ve given them topics that we will be doing presentations for and they pull books and they pull journals and they pull all kinds of things for my
students to physically hold and then show them the databases that they need to go on and they never said no. . . . I really enjoy taking [learners] over to the library. It also shows them that they are a part of the school and they enjoy going over there. We stop over at the café and get a coffee and come back. It’s a good experience and like I said all the people at the library are super helpful. Oh, it’s really good. I’m a library fiend anyway, so I love to show the students that they can go to the library and that it’s there for them. And some of them quite honestly have never checked out a library book, so it’s fulfilling for me to see them go in sort of gobsmacked sometimes. “Wow, look at all these books. I didn’t even know this was over here.” It’s good.

Kay’s comments illustrate the importance of adult education learners being able to access campus. The librarians welcome the adult education learners and have journals and books ready to show them. The librarians also model how learners can use the database to gather additional research. Learners have the opportunity to check out books, which for some of them is a new experience. Following the library visit, Kay takes them to the cafeteria for a hot drink. The walk to the library and cafeteria makes the learners feel more welcome to explore the campus on their own. Kay also took the learners to see a play on campus. She and the adult education learners were well received. Kay explained:

Every department that I’ve ever gone to has been really accepting of the adult ed [learners]. One time I was teaching a novel, The Glass Castle, and [Midwestern Community College Arts Center] had a one-woman show come about that topic, and I was able to take my class to the performance. The person in charge of the performing arts gave us tickets for free and that was really great. [I] used that opportunity to teach my students how to write thank-you notes and send those off to him.

Similar to Kay’s experiences at the library, the performing arts center staff also welcomed the adult education learners. When Kay contacted the senior director of performing arts to get more information about the performance of a play that complemented the text learners were reading in her class, he offered Kay free tickets to the performance for her class. The learners were able to attend the performance during class time. Following the performance, Kay had the learners send the performing arts director thank-you notes for the tickets.
Marie talked about “the different organizations” available on campus that provide learners helping learners. Marie stated: “One thing that I’m greatly impressed with is the students started a food pantry for [MCC] students and they are having an open house tomorrow. I think that’s a great organization.” Jenny also mentioned the food pantry and other amenities available at Midwestern that she believed benefitted learners:

Well, I’m extremely impressed with [Midwestern Community College]. I love that there’s a food pantry for our students that they can go to at any time. I love that there’s the performing arts that make things available for them. I think our students feel like they’re connected to a community when they come. It’s nice that we’re all together in the [adult education building]. The students get to see each other through reading programs and the math [program], and run into each other. So, I think they have a lot of community support.

Access to the Student Services Division was another benefit of the community college. In addition to sharing resources regarding depression provided by the Student Services Division to learners, Marie said she regularly spoke to the director of ADA and student disabilities regarding a student who is blind. Jenny, Carrie and Anika also commented on the benefit of student services. When Jenny had learners with special needs in her class, she knew she could contact “our special education coordinator for the college, [who] helps students get accommodations for classes.” Jenny continued:

So, if students have IEPs, it’s very easy for them to get their paperwork and bring it over to the college. I’ve also seen [her] take students that needed paperwork when they were in [high school and] did not get it. Maybe they dropped out. Then she was able to help them get the paperwork that she needed, so that they could get the accommodations such as extra time or an alternative environment or notes or things that are going to help them be successful in our program.

The adult education faculty provide high quality instruction and as much differentiation as possible, but some learners needed more individual assistance or accommodations to be successful. According to Jenny, the director of ADA and student disabilities services at
Midwestern assisted her many times as learners transitioned through their adult education coursework.

Being treated like all the other learners at the college is mostly a positive experience.

Carrie reflected how excited learners felt to get their Midwestern student ID. “They would show others saying, ‘I got an ID. My college ID.’ It just makes them feel like they’re really at the college and they’re part of that community, and not just this other program off to the side.”

However, sometimes that equal treatment meant having to resolve a problem, as Carrie shared:

Well, it’s an atmosphere that they’re treated like any other students at the college. You know, unfortunately, when we can’t get things to work on the computer, they have to go to the main area, just like all the other students would have to. Sometimes that’s a bit overwhelming, but they do eventually make it there and . . . back.

Anika also spoke about accessing the Student Services Division for situations in which she needed support. Two learners in Anika’s class were disturbing another learner. According to Anika:

One of the students, he’s normally very responsible. He’s a very good student, but somehow, he also joined him in laughing that day. He apologized. He talked to [the director of student success and judicial affairs], who emailed both of them and said to meet him.

Anika had a similar situation several semesters prior to that situation when she contacted the dean of students regarding disruptive learners. Anika described the scenario:

I had . . . I think it was three students. They were doing kind of the same situation in the class. They were laughing and they don’t do the work. They don’t do any classwork or homework. They will be doing their own business, so I had to report this, and [student service personnel] got . . . a warning letter to them. So, I was able to seek support from other people.

Not only does access to the community college provide benefits to learners, but to faculty as well. Anika was able to utilize the support of student services staff to redirect learners. Having this kind of backing on campus allowed Anika to focus on instruction instead of behavior.
In addition to personnel to back up adult educators, when the state neglected to pass a budget a few years ago and funds stopped coming in, the college was willing to financially back the program. Kay spoke about the state budget impasse:

Well, being part of the CCR-SIA project, the College and [Career] Readiness Standards-in-Action project was really good in especially getting to know some people from around the state that do the same thing that we do. Then being part of a team that trained people from other community colleges was really helpful, meeting them, seeing how their programs work. We were all really stressed a couple of years ago with the budget situation and a lot of programs around the state weren’t as lucky as our program. They had to lay off a lot of their teachers and really sort of streamline their program and we were lucky here at [Midwestern] that we never really had to do that. I mean, we had to cut some costs but we never to my knowledge had to lay any teachers off or anything. We never had to cancel any classes. That was eye-opening for us to talk to other people who were like, “Yeah, we are down to five teachers and we had 15.” It made us appreciate our program a lot.

As Kay stated, without state and federal funding, numerous adult education programs struggled to offer services. As programs around the state cut back on instructors and classes, Midwestern’s adult education program was able to continue programming due to support from the college president and board of trustees.

Faculty salaries are also influenced by the community college affiliation. Jeanette retold a conversation she had with another faculty member regarding pay to adjunct faculty:

To put it simply, I have it good. I didn’t know that when I entered in, but I remember talking to a teacher who has since retired and him telling me something about, like, oh, we’re paid at the same rate as the college side of the house. I remember thinking in my head, yeah. I work for the college. I’m an adjunct faculty member. That seems like it should be. And I remember him being like, no, no, no, no. You don’t understand. That’s not how it is across a lot of the state. Like, that’s not how it is. And I was like, really? . . . [Being paid at the same rate as other college adjuncts] makes you feel like a professional in your field.

Jeanette’s situation illustrates a concern of adult educators, albeit one they may not know about until they talk with others in the field. In some places adult education instructors are not
members of the faculty union and therefore are paid less than their peers teaching in other
divisions at the same institution. At Midwestern Community College all faculty, full-time and
part-time regardless of discipline are members of the same union. This parity in pay made
Jeanette feel like she was a “professional in her field.”

Since Bernadette taught at more than one community college, she was aware of the pay
disparity and concurred with Jeanette regarding the positive sentiment adult education faculty
had at Midwestern. According to Bernadette:

I get the sense . . . from what I hear in the workroom over at [Other Community College]
and [Midwestern] that [Midwestern] is much more supportive of their teachers. Part of it
is because they pay us at the same rate as the other teachers per credit hour. . . . That
makes it something where you’d want to stay.

Listening to peers in the faculty workroom at Midwestern and at a neighboring community
college, Bernadette believed colleagues at Midwestern felt better supported than those at the
other community college. She thought part of the support came from all faculty at Midwestern
being on the same pay scale.

Another financial benefit from the college is tuition reimbursement. Using this benefit,
Anika was pursuing a second master’s degree. Jenny also appreciated the tuition reimbursement
benefit offered by Midwestern Community College:

Well, it’s very helpful that we do have an avenue to get those classes compensated for or
paid for because looking at things from a financial point of view, if those weren’t covered
under some of our benefits, it would be really hard to do those if you’re trying to work
within our parameters. So, the benefits of being able to take college classes is really,
really nice.

Many faculty members at Midwestern choose to take graduate-level coursework as professional
development. Like Anika, some pursue additional degrees, and like Jenny, some select individual
courses to inform their teaching practice.
Another way the college influences faculty teaching practices is through offering professional development. Many sessions are offered, but one that is particularly encouraged centers on the classroom observation process. Lara described her experience:

In one of the trainings I felt like I was in the wrong place or signed up for the wrong thing for professional development. But it was on those [faculty] evaluations. And half of the people, I think there were six or seven, were there to get the training on how to evaluate and the others were [there to learn] what to expect from evaluating. So when I first got there, I was like, I’m not going to evaluate anybody. Maybe this isn’t the place I’m supposed to be. . . . they paired us up with a person training to be evaluated, and then going to be [evaluated], and we did this roleplay. The people. . . so it really made me feel like this isn't judgmental. . . . It's in two ways for the evaluator to get to see a wealth of different teaching styles and strategies, and then share with. . . . I don’t get to see what other people are doing, so it's sort of like a liaison. A go-between. Like, okay, tell me what went well. Tell me something I can do better, that you’ve seen out there. You’re in these rooms. You know teachers are around you doing something, but you don’t really get to see it. So that, even the evaluations I’ve had so far [at Midwestern] have felt like I was never nervous. I think because that training was done so well, you’re just going to find out some things you could try, didn't think to try.

As Lara referenced, the idea of classroom observation at Midwestern is to strengthen instructional practices. It is viewed as a positive process, encouraging faculty to try new things.

Professionalism is an important concept in adult education. To encourage professionalism in the field, the state leverages training and curricula development, often through pilots. By participating in many of these projects as well as through the division culture, the adult education leadership at Midwestern conveys the high value of faculty, both full-time and adjunct. Jeanette explained feeling valued by her supervisor:

I think that my supervisors. . . well, I think partly the approach that my supervisors have taken has been more of an influence on me. How do I say this? I. . . in adult ed, I have been allowed flexibility and been more viewed as a professional in adult ed by how I feel from my supervisors than I felt when I was in the K-12 world. And even though in the K-12 world there was so much more. . . there were so many more requirements for being a professional in K-12. Right? You had to have the degree. You had to have endorsements. You had to have the license that had this and this and this on it. And there were more
demands there as far as hours and all kinds of things, but because everything was so regimented and scripted and evaluated in a sometimes punitive or sometimes... there was a tension there in K-12 for me.

Although there are many more requirements (i.e., certification, endorsement, and licensure) to become a K-12 teacher, Jeanette believed she was treated more professionally by her adult education supervisor. She acknowledged the flexibility she was given to make choices about curriculum and methodology as recognition of her expert knowledge:

> Within the first year of teaching at [MCC], I really felt valued as a professional from my supervisor. . . You know, “I value you as a professional. I've vetted you and know that you're a professional. And I expect you to simply be a professional.” . . . And I just think that there was a certain level of respect as well as [being] valued [as] a professional that I didn’t get previously. And I think that that helped me have an open mind because I knew I could. It helped me have some flexibility with my students. . . . So I think that sometimes in adult ed you need flexibility because of the wide range of students, and I was able to give that and I feel like I’m able to devote my time to differentiation and serving my students’ needs, in part because of the structure of adult ed, but also in part because I feel like my supervisors value my professional opinion. . . . There’s also been some messaging throughout the time of just “You are the professional in the room.”

Jeanette’s comments are significant as they illustrate her feeling of being recognized as a professional by her supervisor (Lengeling et al., 2017), something that was lacking in her previous employment. Through knowing her professional background and observing her teach, Jeanette’s supervisor developed knowledge of her strengths, which was conveyed through giving her leeway to make decisions. Jeanette felt comfortable differentiating instruction to learners based on their needs and making other instructional decisions because she had been empowered by her supervisor. Other literature also identified the presence of administrative support as positively influencing teachers’ self-perceptions (Lengeling et al., 2017).

Susan also talked about feeling respected by her supervisor. She felt the actions of supervisors in the division conveyed trust that she did not feel from her other employer:
I just feel like people are more respectful. . . . Supervisors are more respectful. It’s more hands-off, like you are trusted to be able to do what you’re supposed to be doing, as opposed to “We’re following up and making sure and checking up on you constantly,” like sometimes happens. I just feel like it’s more hands-off. It’s more like “I trust that you know what you’re doing and you’re going to be doing a good job with this and I’m here if you have questions.” It’s more of that kind of environment. It feels very relaxed so I’m not stressed out when I’m there. I’m actually very calm. Like I said, it changes my mood when I get there.

The actions of administrators in Midwestern’s adult education division conveyed trust in the faculty to fulfill their responsibilities and to do them well. Susan did not get the idea supervisors were checking up on her. However, she knew supervisors were available to assist when she had questions. Susan found this environment to be relaxing to the point her mood changed when she arrived on campus.

Jenny concurred with Jeanette and Susan regarding the positive influence of the adult education leadership at Midwestern. Jenny spoke about how she perceived the division administration:

I feel like there’s always support. I felt like we always know what’s going on. . . . I feel like we get a lot of information, and I feel like our administration always has an open-door policy. And I feel like that’s extremely important for influencing [our] comfort level . . . and what we feel that we can do. We have a great support system from our administration, and obviously they have a bigger picture of finances and budgets and they have to fit into the whole college. I get all of that, but I still feel like they’re there for what’s best for our students.

Support from division leadership was a common theme among participants. Jenny spoke of being well supported and informed in that she received information regarding division policies, goals, professional development, and other opportunities for involvement. She experienced open communication with her supervisor and other division staff to convey information and answer questions. Like Jeanette, this open communication with her supervisor made Jenny feel like a trusted member of the team. Jenny knew the administration had budgets and other concerns to
consider, but she also saw decisions made as learner centered. Jenny shared a specific example of the support she received from her supervisor and how that influenced her decision to stay at Midwestern:

Well, the biggest influence I think I had was just when I was working between two colleges, because I knew what I needed to do to keep working and maintain it. Just speaking openly with [My Supervisor] to find out, well, do you think it’ll be two classes? Do you think it’ll be one? Because I was between two places. I was between [Local University] and [Midwestern]. I really found that [Midwestern] really worked with more my style and everything. I loved [Local University]; that was fun teaching pre-service teachers. Just a total[ly] different paradigm. I would’ve been happy at both, but I needed to make some decisions. Do I keep this? Do I kind of let go, or what [do] I do? I think just that [My Supervisor’s] open-door policy [helped me decide]. Will you help me decide, you know what? It looks like there's going to be some good opportunity, and I should be able to get the two classes that I need all the time. So that was a huge influencing piece of whether I stayed or I split myself between two places.

Although Jenny taught part-time at two colleges, her preference was to teach at only one institution. She enjoyed both locations for different reasons and for several semesters she struggled to decide if she would continue at both or choose just one. Each semester, as class assignment time came at both institutions, Jenny would speak to her supervisor to get a clear picture of her teaching opportunities at Midwestern for the semester. Jenny’s supervisor was always transparent about the upcoming options and was willing to work with Jenny to plan things out in advance. When Jenny made her decision to continue only at one college, she said her supervisor’s open communication style influenced her selection to stay at Midwestern. This strong feeling of administrative support was echoed by Anika. Anika felt the division administrators were “very supportive.” She was informed “if there's a new program coming up” and included in “what is ongoing.”

One of the many formats for delivering information to faculty is through opening day meetings. This is a chance to share information at the beginning of the fall and spring semesters.
Jeanette “felt like things like the fact that we have a meeting on opening day, which is just like the rest of the college has a meeting on opening day” added to her feeling “like a professional” in her field. Lara also spoke highly of opening day meetings:

The orientation meetings at the beginning, the beginning of . . . what is that called? The semester kickoff meetings. Those have helped me understand the program. The mission. The rules. The guidelines. The progress. Which comes back to me when I'm looking at assessments and the daily planning of things, it’s kind of back here. When I’m taking attendance, it’s like, oh, we’ve got this many hours. All these things that I sort of kind of am getting my head wrapped around. And student questions. At my first orientation meeting like that, the kickoff, the information didn’t make sense to me, but going to those every time changes. It’s like watching a movie more than once. It’s like, “Oh, now I see. That makes sense.” So that's been helpful.

Opening day meetings are typically the only opportunity for division leaders and faculty to communicate with everyone in the same room at the same time. As Lara mentioned, topics for opening day include the division mission, policies, and progress. To be effective and transparent, information is also conveyed at other times, and the more Lara heard the policies and other information, the more sense it made to her. Lara commented she used the information when she looked at assessments, developed lesson plans, and fielded learner questions. She also expressed a better understanding of the relationship between attendance hours and learner assessment and how learner outcomes are the basis for receiving grant funding.

Ariel also commented on the positive influence of division leadership. He noted the building spoke to him when he interviewed to teach in adult education at Midwestern:

It’s interesting because when I was interviewing to be an assistant principal in different districts, I made a mention to my wife, that the buildings talk to you and tell you what your experience is going to be like before you even continue. Before you even get to that interviewer’s office. And here, in this building particularly in the [adult education building], ever since I came in it felt like home…. I love this place. That’s all I can say; I love this place. And yes, the culture is professional, it’s respectful, it’s everybody caring about other people. And it’s from the administrators to the support staff, to the people at the front desk. That’s what makes the secret sauce.
As he entered a building on the day he was to interview, the buildings spoke to him, and when he interviewed for the adjunct position in adult education at Midwestern, the building felt like home. Ariel felt at home teaching at the college because the administrators and staff are professional, respectful, and caring. As Ariel said: “That’s what makes the secret sauce.”

Ariel talked about classroom observations and how supervisors “always encouraged us to try new things, which is good.” He also referred to supervisors being “very flexible,” and following the observations, they provide “suggestions and changes” that Ariel perceived to be “good things.” Bernadette also spoke about a specific example of feedback given to her after a classroom observation when her supervisor “talked . . . about direct and explicit instruction. A lot of the feedback from [My Supervisor] was . . . a great deal of help, you know, in terms of maybe talking, explaining things a little bit slower” that Bernadette also transferred to her community college teaching. Lara concurred with Ariel and Bernadette regarding the value of feedback following evaluator visits. She commented on the positive influence of classroom observations:

The first [classroom observation], my first semester, I was teaching the three levels. I knew I needed to be differentiating. I knew on some level, I needed to be differentiating a whole lot more than I am. So, the feedback I got was definitely what I was expecting to hear, but then it allowed me to ask, well, how do I do when it’s this? How do I do three novels if there’s three different levels? How do we have class discussions? How do I spin all these plates? The suggestions were “Start on something small. Like not a novel, but vocabulary. And the structure for writing and then the expectation to get . . . . The rubrics are different, so the conversations can be the same. You need transition words, and organization, and details, but the expectations would be higher.” So, it just helped me. I felt like I was overwhelmed with how am I going to do this? And she just narrowed it down into little bit-sized chunks.

Lara’s first semester adult education teaching assignment was at outreach, where the levels tend to be merged due to lower enrollment. This is a tough assignment for anyone, but especially a new hire. Lara was challenged to differentiate not just for a continuum of learners in one level, but for learners in three levels. The classroom observation was the perfect stage for feedback on
this challenging task and was welcomed by Lara. She was encouraged to start small with something easier to differentiate like vocabulary. Another well-received suggestion was to differentiate through writing assignments; the lesson can be the same, but the expectations for learner outcomes can be modified according to the learners’ abilities. Lara appreciated the administrator’s advice and specific examples of how to break down into manageable parts what seemed overwhelming at first.

Another way these adjunct faculty felt positively influenced by the administration was through the large selection of materials they could request for instruction. Kay stated:

[Midwestern Community College] supports us by having plenty of materials available to us. We are asked on a regular basis if we are missing any textbooks, if we need to replace textbooks, if there’s any new materials that we have run across that we would like to have. I’ve been able to add a couple of novels to, like, Level 3 and Level 4 reading. Those were approved and purchased and other teachers use them so I think that that’s a fun, exciting thing. So yeah, the college is very supportive in getting us what we need.

Grant policy dictates that learners not be asked to purchase books or materials, so the division dean purchases books and other instructional materials for teacher use with institution and grant funds. The faculty can request materials to use during instruction. Those materials are mostly books, but also include calculators and other instructional materials. Kay asked for a couple of novels for the intermediate-level reading and writing courses. The titles she selected were well received by her peers and the learners.

Carrie also mentioned the availability of resources as having a positive influence on her teaching experience in adult education at Midwestern. In addition to texts and supplies, Carrie regularly used laptops with her learners:

Having your resources, you know, at the school. Having the different novels to choose from, I think is really great. I was actually about to get those big poster papers, too. . . . Having those kind of resources helps make teaching class easier. Having access to the computers. I know I’m like a computer hog with the [laptops]. You know, that’s part of
today’s world. You have to be able to use a computer, and then using a computer now, and if they have no skills on it, how are they going to be able to take the GED test? It’s on a computer. They need that skill set. So, having those resources, the computer, the books, with the little markers and paper all helps make teaching the class a lot easier, to have [those] resources.

Carrie’s comments illustrate how helpful it was to have resources for the classroom. In addition to traditional texts, Carrie worked to get beginning-level readers and writers on the computer as often as possible. She knew the value of teaching her learners computer skills for test taking and for use in “today’s world.” The adult education program has several computer classrooms, but not enough for every faculty member to be assigned a computer classroom every class period. Laptops were used to supplement the computer classrooms in the adult education building.

While most of the comments from the participants were very positive regarding the influences of the college and the adult education division, there were also some frustrations brought forward as well. The frustrations centered on computer availability, lack of resources at outreach, not using the cloud for material storage, and student assessment forms.

One of Jenny’s frustrations was the lack of access to computers for learners. The division assigned faculty who wanted computer access to a small group and a computer room. The advanced-level classes had computer room priority, so the teachers worked together to meet everyone’s computer needs. The situation sounds easier than it is, according to Jenny:

It’d be nice to have a little bit more access to computers . . . we do a lot of sharing. So, at the beginning of the semester, we have one person or two people that we can share a computer room with. It’s not really efficient because somebody will start out in the classroom, has to pick up all their stuff, move the room to shift with you, and then you pick up all your students. It sounds easier in theory than it is, so it’s easier not to do it. We have some [laptops]. At the level I teach with, for the very first time, students have never signed on to a laptop. They’re unable to sign onto a [laptop] until they get to a computer lab. You have to be on a hardwired computer in order to sign on for the first time. After you’ve signed onto them, then we can use the [laptops]. It’s been a while. Last time the internet still causes some problems. Not near what it is. But again, because
I’m in the lower-level math, and it’s really difficult to get computer time, I haven’t done as much of the computer aspect of learning that I would like, just because that’s a little bit difficult of a piece.

Jenny detailed the challenge of the computer sharing arrangement. Jenny described having to set up in one classroom for part of the class time, then pack everything up and move to a different room for the second half. Everyone was willing to make the moves, but it was difficult. Another option was to request laptops. Jenny was not doing that much either because, due to the way the college had configured the login, learners had to sign onto a hardwired computer their first time at the college. Since Jenny often taught the beginning-level courses, these were not available for most of her learners. The frustrations with computer access were significant, as they led Jenny to make fewer requests for computer time, which impacted her learners’ technology access.

Like Jenny, Marie talked about computer sharing as an instructional challenge. In addition to moving personal and instructional materials, Marie also mentioned learners not always getting to the correct classroom:

I don’t mind sharing, but it is kind of a headache, moving supplies for computer rooms. Then we had a third teacher which is fine, I responded we will make it work of course, but then I had students you know, no matter if you’re putting up signs or what, you’ve always got somebody who is not where they need to be. So, I switched room three times, up to three different rooms I guess is what I’m saying. You know it’s a little labor-intensive moving stuff and shagging down people, but I think that is my greatest [challenge]. I would still like to be able to go into that learning center and take my class, you know. There’s so many computers in there, because sometimes those little laptops are not great, so to me a lot of computer [challenges].

Marie was happy to share resources, but it was frustrating to move all her instructional supplies between classrooms after getting set up in the first classroom. Marie’s group was given an additional teacher with whom to arrange a sharing schedule. She was amicable to working with other faculty so computers were accessible to all classes, but it added another classroom shift to
the mix. Marie also shared that, no matter how many signs were posted, there were always learners who did not find their way to the right classroom. Additionally, she wished classes were able to use the computer lab in the building that belonged to another division.

Similar to Jenny and Marie, Ariel’s challenging experience related to technology. The outreach site classes used by adult education do not have the same access to technology available on campus. Ariel described the situation and why it was problematic for him:

The setting here is very professional; we have great tools in the classroom. We don’t have those same tools when we go to satellite sites like [Neighboring Town Village Hall] or [Neighboring Town High School]. So, I feel like I’m at a loss when I’m at the location, because then I’m restrained only to books and papers. So, I feel that even though we could sign out a laptop and a portable [document camera], you know, it’s tedious . . . to come in and sign it out, before you go teach at those locations. But I have done it in the past and [brought] a portable projector. That’s a lot of things to carry. You know? Three bags to carry on top of your material. So, I don’t do it that often, [except] when I am assigned to a satellite location, because I feel that [lack of technology] is a handicap. Because for me, videos are important. Visuals are very important. Me being able to demonstrate, I prefer to use the [document camera] during math problems. Because I’m a very big person, when I’m writing on the board, the students cannot see what I am writing until after I have written it, because I’m blocking them. So, with the [document camera] it’s different. I’m doing it on the [document camera], and they can actually see my strokes of the pen as I am speaking it, and then, it’s a more effective way of learning for them and teaching for me.

Almost all, if not all, of the classrooms on the Midwestern Community College campus have computers, projectors, and document cameras for faculty use. However, outreach sites may not provide the same access to technology. Ariel explained his preference for using a document camera came from his desire to model math problems for learners. He felt that his large size made writing on the board difficult for learners to see until the writing was completed and he moved out of the way. By using the document camera, Ariel could position himself away from the screen displaying his writing. This arrangement allowed Ariel to model instruction and
learners to see his notes or figures in real time. The advantage of using the document camera during the lesson made teaching at outreach sites less desirable for Ariel, as he knew he would need to carry in equipment.

What Lara found challenging in adult education was also technology related. Lara wished for “the digital storage of common assessments.” Common assessments as well as course curricula and other faculty resources are stored on a shared drive at the college, so faculty “have to be in this building to get those resources.” Lara noted that “if it was in the cloud, I could be anywhere. So I ended up saving all those to my cloud, which is fine. But that [shared] drive does me no good, really.” It was easier for her to save the resources she used regularly to her personal cloud storage, so she could access them from home.

The common assessments Lara wanted stored in the cloud were related to what Carrie and Bernadette found challenging in adult education. The common assessments were completed by learners at various points of the semester to determine if course outcomes were being met. This informed instruction and impacted future learner course placement. The document used by faculty to record the results of the common assessment is the student assessment form (SAF). Carrie felt more direction was needed “to take how I teach and collect information to fit on [the student assessment form].” Bernadette also was confused by the document. She expressed her frustration:

The thing that I’m feeling so much confused about is that when I fill [the student assessment form] out, we have to have three different dates of assessment. And this insistence that we still have to have numbers in there, even if a student has left your class. I have some students maybe who have only shown up for like three weeks, and then they’re gone. So, they don’t have time to take the midterm or the final. And I’m being, there is an insistence that I put in some numbers based upon what I’ve observed. I try to do that. I put in dates that try to correspond or I try to put in a date. I would always have the last date as the date that they left. You know? But the middle date, I’d have to figure
out the days that they were there and try to make an assessment. And I’m told that that’s not sufficient. I’m told that it has to be actual data. And it’s like we don’t have time. We don’t have time if they’ve only been there for like three or four weeks to give you three sets of data. So, to me, this is very conflicting. And I think that I’m being asked to do something that is not possible.

Faculty are asked to document the progress of learners to inform lesson planning and to recommend the next course placement for learners in their class. Many instructors share the student assessment form with learners so the learners can also be aware of their progress. At minimum, three data points are requested on the SAF. Bernadette explained her struggle to assign three data points to learners who were in class only a short time. She was able to determine a date and corresponding data to the learner’s final day of class, but because early departure was unexpected, she had difficulty with a point between the first day and the last day of attendance. Bernadette was conflicted as to how to complete this task when it happened and believed the current practice was confusing.

**Influence of Adult Education on Teaching Perspective**

Participants all gained from teaching in adult education. A common idea was how the life experiences of the learners influenced the participants. While they believed themselves to be open-minded before joining the department, many felt they gained a broader perspective as they stayed on. Participants also were influenced by participating with their colleagues on projects. Not only did their instructional practice improve, but their peer relationships did too.
Wisdom from our Learners: Gaining an Inclusive Perspective

The participants described teaching adult education changing their perspective on teaching in many ways. Teaching in adult education widened the outlook teachers had of the learners around them. Faculty members discovered there were many reasons learners came to the program to earn a high school equivalency, and empathy surfaced as an emotion faculty felt was important when engaging with learners. Fink (2013) also concluded that caring about learners played a meaningful role in faculty interaction. Additionally, participants shared several ways they connected to learners because they wanted to convey an inclusive perspective or sense of belonging through their actions, a sentiment also supported by the literature (Hamachek, 1999).

Bernadette stated her assumption before teaching in adult education that learners completed high school and then went to college:

I used to just have in mind a student who came in out of high school and right into college. And so, in my head, they all had this background knowledge. Once I started teaching adult ed, I realized that there’s quite a few people out there, especially the lower level ones who maybe never have even gone to school or haven’t gone to school in 20 years.

She discovered not all learners follow the educational pattern to which she was accustomed. She learned that many individuals have a different educational experience. Bernadette had learners in her adult education classes with varying levels of school attendance. Some learners had never attended school and for others there had been a long gap since their last school experience.

Recognizing lack of schooling should not define learners in adult education, Marie shared a piece of advice she had received. She stated: “They come with many, many experiences that are wonderful and that can help them. They are accomplished. They are not just downtrodden. They come with experiences that are valuable. That was good advice.” Marie’s remarks show the
respect often given to life experiences in the adult education classroom. Susan’s perspective also changed when she began teaching adult education. Susan described two learners she recently had in class:

I had a student whose mom had a lot of health issues and she had some incident that happened because she was [in another part of the state] and so she had to come up here and stay with family up here and that’s why she couldn’t finish high school. It had nothing to do with how she was acting in school, how she was understanding things. It wasn’t behavior issues. It was some kind of family emergency that happened. I [also] had a student from Pakistan, so she’s here and she wants to take college classes but she doesn’t have a high school diploma from the United States. So it’s just giving more perspective on people, and then it’s also giving stories and faces to these people instead of just thinking about people dropping out of high school. It’s like understanding them and seeing that there’s more there and understanding their struggles and what they are going through.

Learners came with very different life experiences. One learner had an ill mother with whom she had been living in another part of the state. As the mother’s health declined, the learner had to move in with family living near Midwestern Community College. This impacted her ability to complete high school. Another of Susan’s learners was from Pakistan. The learner wanted to attend college but was lacking a high school diploma from the United States and felt it would benefit her to first complete the high school equivalency. Susan felt their stories provided another way to understand the learners’ struggles, what they experienced before landing here, and put a different face on who is typically thought of as needing to attend a program for a high school equivalency.

While Susan’s comments focused on learners that others might have been surprised to see in adult education, Jenny talked about learners who are thought of more traditionally:

I think they came from environments where they struggled and they didn't get the individual help that they needed. I think they might have been misunderstood because I
think behavior comes out when we want to protect ourselves from looking dumb or not getting it or understanding. And I think I’ve learned from a lot of our students.

Jenny’s remarks speak to looking at learners from another perspective. Jenny believed a cause of learners leaving high school could be related to struggling and not getting enough individual assistance to be successful. She suggested that learners may have chosen to present behaviors out of fear of revealing a lack of understanding. Jenny explained how she encouraged success with these learners:

I think what works for me is that I can be empathetic with our students, and I differentiate well just because that's what I’ve always done. And it’s funny when students come in. Whether they have IEPs or not, I realize I kind of fall into that mode and say, “Oh, okay. Why don’t you try this?” Or, “Why don’t you cover this up?” or “Why don’t you do this?” Or, “Let’s break this down. Why don’t you just do half of this page?” So, I find myself kind of breaking or getting into that mode right away. Again, I’m not sure why we’re having so many more students with special needs come into our [program], but the sad part is they’re not graduating from high school. That’s why they’re coming into our program. I’m going to be honest, that’s why. But yeah. I think I differentiate, and it works for our students.

Having a special education background gave Jenny effective tools when working with adult education learners. She was empathetic and differentiated instruction often. She showed learners how to break down longer and more complicated tasks and provided learners with alternative ways of completing assignments when a learner was struggling, whether they had documentation for accommodations or not. Jenny noticed an increase in the number of learners with special needs attending the adult education program since they were not graduating from high school.

Like Jenny, empathy was a strength for Marie and a significant part of her response to learners:

Well, I definitely think empathy for sure. I’ve always said that. I think if a teacher does not have empathy that’s really not good and I think that is my greatest [quality]. Understanding that people, they have so much potential and that’s what I truly believe,
and I think that’s a quality. I come in with an open mind and I think that’s a good quality to have, because if you don’t believe that people can improve or achieve something they want, then what’s the point?

Marie’s comments illustrate a paramount understanding in the program. The program is built on giving learners a second chance at a high school education. One of the tenets for faculty success is the willingness to see a situation from the learner’s perspective. Marie believed in the potential of her learners. She believed they could learn and accomplish goals. Knowing that second chances were the program’s foundation, she wondered why someone would teach in this department if they felt otherwise. A recent division professional development session and an instructor roundtable were conducted on empathy, further illustrating the importance of the concept within the division.

Most of the instructors came in with open minds and found they have to be willing to incorporate that openness into their everyday teaching practices. Kay discovered the classroom seating arrangement was an area in which she had to be flexible:

I was accustomed to a traditional [high school] classroom although we may have had slightly varied seating arrangements or whatever, but it was mostly I’m the teacher: the students face me and I teach the class. Here you may have students who . . . want to sit in a corner. They want to be . . . protected with the computer in front of them and I had to be okay with that. I had to think outside of my classroom-setting IQ and let them sit. If I had the students sitting in, say, groups of four and I know I have a student who just doesn’t like to do group work I have to be okay with that, and so that’s been helpful, not pressuring. I mean, I wouldn’t pressure somebody to be in a group if they didn’t want to be in a group, but not just being okay with the fact that they don’t like group work. They don’t want to be in that group, and eventually throughout the semester that person does warm up and get involved in the class. Usually I have two or three every semester, and so I’ve had to teach myself that that’s okay for them to be that way.

Coming in with teaching experience from the K-12 system was very helpful for Kay and the other adult educators, but Kay’s previous classrooms had been managed in a particular way. Kay
found it was beneficial to be more learner-centered in adult education, including classroom management. Kay had learners in her class who did not want to sit with the rest of the group. In some cases, they wanted to sit in the corner of the classroom or perhaps used the computer as a social barrier. She had learners who did not want to participate with groups. While Kay never required a learner to work in a group, she felt classroom freedom to be more acceptable in the adult education program, so it was a concept with which she had to make peace. Kay also stated that often the learners who chose not to sit with others or participate in groups at the beginning of the semester gained comfort with the groups and eventually participated.

Classroom management also included the recognition that learners had lives outside the classroom and might need to eat during class. Ariel told his learners they could eat while he taught:

So that they are in the evening mostly working parents, sometimes rushing to get here to sit in class. So that’s why I tell them point blank. If you’re so hungry because you’re rushing here from the job, get yourself a happy meal or something from Taco Bell or something you prepared at home. I don’t care that you’re eating while I’m teaching because I want you to take care of your basic necessities. That’s part of learning; take care of your basic necessities first, and then you’re open to learning. And many times, they bring snacks to share and what now. So, it’s that kind of an environment at night.

Many of the evening learners worked during the day and took class at night. This busy schedule often meant they either did not eat dinner or they ate during class. Ariel was sure to let his learners know eating during class was welcomed. He encouraged them to bring something to eat if needed, as it would keep their minds on learning instead of being hungry. Ariel said many learners even brought snacks to share. Ariel continued by describing the demographic of learners in his evening class:

My evening classes are typically across the board: they are of low income, they’re struggling, they want the GED because they want a better life for their family. They have
immigration issues, and they are always scared that we are going to tell on them. And I have to remind them that they are in a safe place and everybody here loves them and we’re not going to be turning them in. And that helps them relax, but they always wonder. I’ve been told that they wonder. Yeah, and I . . . I again, tell them to relax, I say this is my eighth year here and we love everybody. We want everybody to succeed. No matter where you come from, no matter what your situation is. So, I try to reassure them.

Ariel described his evening learners as wanting to earn a high school equivalency to make a “better life for their family.” He explained they often were struggling and earning a low income. Many of the learners had immigration issues and worried about others knowing their status. Ariel assured them no one at the college was “going to be turning them in.” The college wants all learners, including undocumented learners, to feel welcome and that they belong at Midwestern. Learner success is what matters, not immigrant status, at Midwestern Community College.

Kay also heard the concerns of immigrant families in her class. She revealed not having encountered learners in this situation before coming to Midwestern:

The personal side of their story, I really just did not know a lot about immigrant families and how many people in this area are undocumented. It just never occurred to me and I’ve had students fairly regularly come to class and say they had a parent or a relative or a friend who got deported. It’s just really hard to, I don’t know what to say to them because it’s not my experience and I just never realized that there were that many students in our area that experience that on a daily basis. They are afraid on a daily basis. I didn’t know that.

The experience of having immigrant families in class was new to Kay. She did not realize there were many learners in the program impacted by immigration and immigration policies. Some relatives and friends of those in Kay’s class had been deported or felt threatened with the possibility of deportation. Kay’s learners had to face this fear regularly and she was not sure what to say to them. Midwestern Community College and the adult education division have staff members with whom learners can discuss their immigration status and receive appropriate
resources. Faculty are not expected to have all the resources, but as Kay found, faculty are often
the first college employees learners feel they can trust.

Just as learners confiding their immigrations status with their teacher build a bond,
faculty develop connections with learners for many reasons. Ariel spoke of a connection he built
with a learner. He shared a scenario in which a learner was abused by family members:

I make myself very open and receptive to being there to help in whatever it is that they
need. Whether it’s a resource for a social service agency, which I’ve had to do a few
times. And especially when I was teaching at the [Outreach Center in Neighboring
Town]. But, luckily in [Neighboring Town], we have a social services agency there that
does not care about their immigration status either. So, since we knew that we felt we
were sending them to a safe place. And many times, they got a lot of help. And [once] it
was [a student who] confided . . . in me that she was being abused by her husband and by
her husband’s brother. And I had to intervene and say, “You need to go to the
[Neighboring Town] Police Department, not to the police department because I realize
you’re scared. But go to the social workers in the door to the right, and they will help
you.” And they did; they helped her.

Ariel wanted his learners to know he could be used as a resource for many situations. He did not
have all the answers, but he could direct learners to the appropriate resources.

Connecting to learners was also paramount for Carrie. When asked to bring an artifact
representing her adult education experience, Carrie brought in several texts. The books she
selected all were narratives of journey. Carrie explained:

The artifacts I came up with, and I don’t have *A Long Walk to Water*, but to me, the
connection you make when you read a novel with the students. Not only are they learning
and vocabulary words, but usually they can connect some aspect of their life. The
importance of learning different, the way other people think, and their journeys, helps
them think about their journey. And so of course I’ve done *Life Is So Good* many times in
my class. I have done *Esperanza Rising*, and *A Long Walk to Water*, which I don’t have
because it’s actually at [MCC]. All have different journeys from different people’s
perspectives. *A Long Walk to Water* and *Life Is So Good* [are] nonfiction, where
*Esperanza Rising* is a fictional [text], but it’s based on something [historical], and *I
Always Write Back* is another good example of books [of journey].
Narratives of journey were one way Carrie connected with learners. The books provided a backdrop for vocabulary and comprehension development but, just as important, gave learners a peek into someone else’s life. Carrie used the journeys of the characters as a way for learners to connect with her, each other, and the text. The characters’ journeys also gave learners a chance to see the world from another perspective and discuss how they might have responded in similar circumstances. These conversations also gave the learners an opportunity to reflect on their own journeys.

Making connections were also how Ariel related to his learners, but he focused on cultural connections. Ariel felt the more he knew about the learners’ cultures, the more his learners would engage in class and have a sense of belonging. Like Carrie, Ariel’s artifact represented learner connection and relationships. He explained:

I brought the güiro because the güiro is a traditional instrument of Latin America. The roots [go] all the way back to the Africans. Africans came to Puerto Rico; . . . they were brought over as slaves by the Spaniards to colonize Puerto Rico. The Taíno Indians existed already on my island of Puerto Rico. I am fortunate enough to say I have a Taino grandfather, a Spaniard grandmother, and my father is directly from African descent. So all those cultures tie into me. . . . As I was growing up, my uncle used to be a musician and at Christmas time we do parrandas. Parrandas is going unexpectedly visiting the family and friends in the area, in the neighborhood, and waking them up to music [by] literally standing at the door. And so he used to let me play the güiro. . . . This [instrument] is what keeps the rhythm in traditional Puerto Rican music. . . . How does it relate to educating students? Well, in adult education in Spanish, particularly, if you want to get them to talk and engage, you want to talk and engage about their culture. When you start engaging them about their culture, they light up like a lightbulb and everything spews out and then they’re really with the program. With the non-Latino students, I have to find the background knowledge that they bring into the classroom. . . . If I want to be effective, I have to find that background knowledge. And I have to connect to it. And activate it, to then scaffold their learning from it. And I’m fortunate, I’m in a classroom sometimes with six and seven different nationalities, but when we start talking and writing about culture, that’s when the class turns on. And it’s just magnificent. At that point it’s magnificent. . . . So, the students, when you decide to talk about their culture
and activate their culture they feel wanted; they feel like they belong. They feel like they are being accepted.

When asked to bring an artifact representing adult education at Midwestern Community College, Ariel brought a güiro (see Figure 2). The güiro was a musical instrument Ariel’s uncle had played as they visited family and friends as part of a Puerto Rican tradition known as parrandas. Ariel explained the background of the instrument and his cultural heritage. He explained the reason he selected the güiro as his artifact was that it represented developing learner relationships through culture. In his experience, when he encouraged learners to discuss their cultures and he also had some knowledge, the learners were more engaged in class. Ariel talked about learners getting excited and participating when they were engaged in a cultural conversation. He tried to connect learning to their culture with all the learners. Ariel believed this connection made learners feel they belonged.

Initiatives in Adult Education: Gaining an Instructional Perspective

Adult education had an influence on these faculty members’ teaching practices. One project, the College and Career Readiness Standards-in-Action (CCR-SIA) project in which several participants were involved, impacted them in many ways. Evidence-Based Reading Instruction (EBRI), sometimes referred to as STAR in adult education, also had an impact. Faculty also spoke about how they were transferring adult education concepts into their community college and K-12 teaching practices.

One of the national pilots in which Midwestern Community College adult educators participated was leading to improvements in the instructional model of adult education. For
Figure 2. Güiro originally belonging to Ariel’s uncle.

(Source: Ariel, personal communication, 2019).
I was involved in a national or federal program as a pilot, as an instructor, as part of the pilot program for professional development for instructors in standards-based instruction. That pilot led to a pathway training within [this state] that is now mandated by [the state board for community colleges] for all instructors to go through standard proficient training. So throughout that process, that included piloting it as an instructor and getting feedback, and then moving on to presenting that material to instructors. And then now, for the past year and a half, I have held a position associated with [the state board for community colleges] as a separate grant program as the math resource specialist for [this state]. So I provide PD to ABE/ASE instructors as mandated by [the state board for community colleges].

The state was one of 12 states invited to participate in the College and Career Readiness Standards-in-Action national pilot sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE). Through the pilot, state teams of adult educators learned how to develop effective curriculum and instruction from content standards. In determining how to scale up the pilot, the state chose to roll out the training to adult education faculty across the state by developing a series of instructional pathways, including language arts and math specialists. Jeanette participated during Midwestern’s early involvement in the pilot and was asked to participate in training faculty throughout the state. When a full-time position opened in the organization tasked with executing the state training, Jeanette was offered the job. She now is a math resource specialist providing professional development to adult educators across the state. Jeanette also retained her adjunct position at Midwestern; she believed this gave her credibility among faculty in the field.

Marie also was positively influenced by participating in the pilot. She commented about feeling like a learner and the camaraderie she experienced:

We were going to the two-day workshop . . . that was just starting to understand how to prove text is at its level and how assignments are relevant to the standards. So we spent pretty much . . . until 4:30—8:30 to 4:30, took a break for lunch, but we had the opportunity to be the learners, and it’s a nice thing to do because it reminds me of how
my students feel when I feel, you know, just inadequate, when I’m learning a new task. It’s frustrating and irritating, but it was helpful that we all chitchatted about it. And then later after the day it was nice because we went out to dinner and that was right in the college town so it was a nice summer evening, or at least was warm. There were about eight of us maybe . . . It was a nice night.

Marie described full-day workshops learning about text and assignment alignment to standards as part of the College and Career Readiness Standards-in-Action pilot. She expressed being able to act as a learner and the good that came from that experience. It forced her to remember the feelings she experienced when learning something new, sometimes that was frustration, and also how helpful it was to discuss the concepts with colleagues.

Jenny also was influenced by the College and Career Readiness Standards-in-Action training made available through adult education at Midwestern. Jenny described the new motivation sparked by the math specialist training she attended:

Well, I’m very happy [at Midwestern Community College]. Like I said, I love teaching the classes I do. My satisfaction is much greater in math now . . . maybe because I taught reading and writing for so many years. . . . I like the challenge of the math and I like the new perspective of all of it. Just doing something new and different. So that is an influence. If I had to go back to reading and writing all the time, I don’t know that I’d be quite as motivated, but I would surely do it. I mean, it’s not that I don’t like it, but I’ve really been enjoying the new math training. I think because I am going through or have gone through the math specialist training, I just have a new fire for it. I think in life we all like to do new things once in a while and that’s just the place I’m at. I’m doing something new and I like it. I’m learning new things to do with it, and so that’s my motivation to keep doing it.

As a special educator coming from the K-12 system, Jenny had experience teaching a wide variety of subjects, but reading and writing were her primary areas. In adult education at Midwestern, Jenny taught reading and writing, but more often, she taught math. Jenny’s comments illustrate her newfound motivation and perspective for teaching math after attending
the math specialist training. This excitement concurs with Rossetti’s (2002) finding regarding the positive influence lifelong learning has on faculty.

Anika expressed the effect of the CCR-SIA pilot: “The CCR one is the one which influenced majorly, like in terms of the condensed standards. That is one major thing in terms [of] teaching.” Anika participated in the training after her supervisor “suggested that [training] to me.” Using information from the math specialist training, Anika worked on a committee revising the student assessment forms to increase their alignment to the standards. Anika shared that working on the committee allowed her to “be part of the progress of the program.”

Before the CCR-SIA training was introduced, the most influential adult education instructional initiative had been Student Achievement in Reading (STAR). Developed by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE), STAR teaches adult educators how to implement evidence-based reading instruction. Marie explained how the two initiatives were related and prepared her to teach in adult education:

Aligning the state content standards, that was a couple of years, a couple of summers for sure. Then working on becoming a language arts specialist, so traveling downstate to [College Town] for various training sessions and then facilitating some with a person who worked for the state, just many different, I don’t know, it’s a progression of understanding. Initially I think what really kicked off that thought process of going toward the content standards was the EBRI. I went through the STAR training and I think that was probably the beginning, honestly, categorizing the components of reading and now you understand how the standards fit into each of those.

Marie detailed the progression of projects that significantly shaped adult education instruction over the last decade and influenced her as a teacher. She explained STAR training examined the relationship among the four components of reading (i.e., alphabetics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension) along with effective teaching methods, which was the beginning of adult education’s focus on standards. After STAR was introduced, the Common Core State Standards
were released. Following the approval of the Common Core State Standards, adult educators aligned the state adult basic and secondary education standards to first the Common Core and then the College and Career Readiness Standards. The language arts portion of the CCR-SIA incorporated the essential foundations of reading, which helped Marie understand how those reading components were related to the standards.

Even as an experienced K-12 language arts teacher, Lara found benefit in the evidence-based reading instruction model contained in the STAR training:

I’m doing the STAR training, and that’s definitely already given me some [new reading tools] because of the assessments and the diagnostic feedback. That’s opened up a whole new world for me . . . . In all those areas, fluency and comprehension, it’s helped me with the second language students identifying and assisting them in their growth in my class. So that training, . . . it’s given me, just knowing the resources, like look, we can pinpoint where the struggle is. If it looks like comprehension, it might really be caused by something else. So that’s exciting to me. Well, right now, it’s just an awareness of the two students that volunteered to do that with me. One has repeated this level three times. And I didn’t think [the learner] was a second language type person. But there’s definitely vocabulary that was affecting comprehension. Word recognition. Just lack of reading experience.

Lara stated she already appreciated the assessments and diagnostic feedback encouraged by the program. Lara said that learning more about the relationship among the reading components had “opened up a new world” for her. The training had given her new resources to assist learner growth. For example, one of the learners in her class who volunteered to be assessed by Lara as part of the training has repeated the level three times. The assessments were indicating the learner needed more instruction in vocabulary, so Lara knew where to focus her lesson. Lara shared the similarities of the academic levels she taught during the day in K-12 and the evening in adult education made preparation easier. She found the content, standards, materials, and resources used in one setting could often be used successfully in the other setting:
I think 21 years of preparation at sixth grade makes it seem less to do the adult basic ed third and fourth [levels]. The content, the standards, the materials and resources are helping in both areas. . . . The hardest thing to stop at the beginning was calling them kids, because for 20 years, that’s what I did with students. Now I call all of them students in both parts of my world.

Lara also found teaching in adult education influenced how she referred to her middle schoolers. Previously Lara referred to her K-12 class as kids, but knowing she could not do that in adult education, she began referring to learners in both settings as students.

Being able to use adult education resources in both of her work settings was helpful to Carrie too. When talking about meaningful adult education professional development, Carrie wanted to be “able to see how you can use [the content of professional development trainings], not only teaching day to day with the adults, but at my [K-12] job too.” Carrie had several examples of when she had used professional development content gained from adult education training in her K-12 teaching position. Carrie referred to the language arts specialist training that was developed from the CCR-SIA project:

Well, just recently, when we went to the last [training] . . . now you're a specialist with the standards. We took, looking at our own [lesson] plans and how they met the different standards, and then evaluate other people’s work and see how they met the standards. [Then] applying that to the assessments and the curriculum overall. It was very interesting and a good experience because I could see how close I was on task. I would find myself, when I’m in my regular job, I would get rid of that question and that question because it doesn’t meet any standards. That homework’s not necessary because it’s really not meeting any standards. So it’s something I not only use for my own classroom to make sure things are where they’re supposed to be, but I find that I’m using it for my other job, too.

Part of the language arts specialist training involved learning to align lesson plans to the standards. In addition to checking their own plans for alignment, those in the professional development session worked with other faculty at the sessions to confirm everyone was on track
with lesson alignment. In addition to checking the alignment of her adult education material, Carrie found herself checking the alignment of the materials in her K-12 teaching position as well and removing questions that did not meet any of the standards the lesson was addressing. Carrie also found she was utilizing the adult education training in her K-12 special education role when she modified the assessments of another teacher. Carrie talked about checking to see if her co-teacher’s assessment was aligned to the standards taught in the lesson:

If I have my [K-12] special education hat on in deciding what should really be on that assessment that I’m going to create based on this other teacher’s. Here’s what she wants to give on [the] assessment. I need to modify the assessment. I’m looking at these questions, well, these don’t really meet any standards. I’m not going to put them on there. And I can justify with her, well, they didn’t meet any standards. These ones did. That’s why I kept [them] on. It would be an extra-long test and really not important for them. I definitely don’t always make great friends with [my] co-teacher by taking things out that she thought [were] important, but they really weren’t standards.

Having recently taken over a K-12 high school teaching assignment, Bernadette also found her adult education training transferred to the K-12 setting. Bernadette spoke about an experience in her high school algebra class:

I’m sitting here in the algebra classes, and they’re using these algebra tiles. And they’re multitasking doing things three different ways all at once, and I’m like, holy cow. And I’m looking at the students to try to see if they really are getting it. Some of them are. Some of them are not. And I resort back to my adult ed. I think to myself, well, maybe they can multitask, but I feel like, you know what? I think that it needs to be slowed down.

She observed the instruction of her K-12 peers as she prepared to take over an algebra class mid-year. She was amazed by the learners’ ability to multitask by learning three ways to reach a solution at once. She observed whether the learners were understanding the lesson. Many were, but for those who were not, Bernadette thought about her adult education training and the concept of meeting the learners’ pace.
Driving Force: Gaining a Big-Picture Perspective

Adjunct faculty are shaped from many directions. Learners, colleagues, division administrators, college staff, and many others impact how and why faculty teach in adult education at Midwestern Community College. When asked to bring an artifact that represented Jeanette’s experience, she brought in a drawing of a plant. She described the drawing and the influences it represented:

It’s a picture of a plant, specifically a plant that has vines because I wanted it to have this idea of it stretching outside of its own pot. I labeled some things on the picture because I thought of it as an analogy for my socialization at [MCC] or adult ed. The pot it’s in is the actual location. It’s the [MCC] faculty office. . . . That’s where it is all kind of rooted from, if you will, like the roots kind of start there because that’s just simply proximity. Being close to people. The plant is, I guess, [is] me. And with all these tendrils coming off it with this idea that you are being pulled, but also growing toward different things. Growing toward helping your students, growing toward working with your staff members, with your administrators, with your coworkers, people across campus and so on and so forth. . . . You are helping students as you go and that could be each leaf. Then I also drew two other things on here that I thought [were] important. What else is important for a plant is sunshine and water. Right? Those are the necessities. So, I think of the sunshine as my coworkers, partly because they truly do bring a smile to your face, right, when you see them? Especially when [you] might be in this dark, dim pot, all by yourself, whether you are teaching a night class or you are just alone or you’ve had a bad day, sometimes [colleagues] are that sunshine, that bright light, but also you, I feel like you need them to be, not only be successful, but to also be good at what you do and you need them to support these students that you’re growing on this vine. And the administrators are the water and you need them too, but for different reasons. Right? You need the hydration and the support. So I guess, I’d think of the two things, the sun and the water, as things we need, but also things that we want and the more we have these things, the more we will grow and thrive and so that’s my artifact.

The plant illustrated the connectedness Jeanette saw among all the parts of the college and how the various agents influenced the adjunct faculty (see Figure 3). The plant represented Jeanette and the pot in which the plant sat was the Midwestern adult education faculty workroom. The tendrils that came from the plant were all the ways the plant was pulled and grew toward
different influences. The plant grew toward learners, staff members, administrators, colleagues, and other staff members across campus. The leaves represented the learners as they were assisted by Jeanette. The sunshine was the smiling face and supportive hand of her colleagues, and the water was the support of the administration. All of these worked in a symbiotic fashion for the success of the adjunct faculty member.

Figure 3. Plant illustrating Jeanette’s professional relationships.

(Source: Jeannette, personal communication, 2019).
In agreement with the literature (Lortie, 1975; Richardson & Placier, 2001; Staton & Hunt, 1992; Zeichner & Gore, 1989), participants felt learners had the strongest influence on their adult education teaching experience and practice. Ariel remarked: “The students influence me the most” and it “is because of the students that I stay. It is because of seeing the great change that I’m causing in students. That gives me the desire to do more.” Ariel felt he was making a difference in their lives. Following the learners, Ariel felt most influenced by his peers and spoke of his peers like family:

My peers will probably come second because I see them as my family. Even though we don’t see each other as often as we want to. But when we do, we have that instant bonding, instant connection all over again. The leadership will come third. Because the leadership is what keeps us together, what keeps the communication flowing back and forth in communication is so important. The transparency of an organization also, anticipating the changes coming into an organization, and setting the expectations. So, they are like the güiro. They set the beat. So, I would say that’s where the leadership comes. So, if the güiro sets the beat, it’s the leadership. The peers are the musicians in the band behind the güiro. The students are the people we are visiting, house to house, and that’s how you can make that analogy.

Ariel said his colleagues do not get to see each other as often as they would like to, but when they do, their bond is instantly reinstated. After learners and peers, Ariel next felt influenced by the division leadership because it keeps communication going among the groups. Ariel also mentioned the transparency, change anticipation, and expectation-setting roles of administration as important. He compared administrators to the güiro he brought in as his artifact, in that they set the beat. Ariel’s colleagues were the musicians in the band, and the learners were the family and friends being visited during the parrandas.

Similarly, Marie felt a prominent force was her learners’ positive effect on her classroom. She expressed liking her “students a lot because if they weren’t here that would not be a very
interesting day. . . . They make school enjoyable.” After learners, Marie felt influenced by “my colleagues, the work, and then the supervisors.”

Anika also said the learners had a great effect on her and shared how the learners impacted her instructional practice:

I would say by the students. They are like the driving force. And then the more motivated students are, you know, they demand what they need. It’s like you are more motivated to give them more or give them more resources or go more detailed or try to understand what they need. I think that is the first thing. The other workshops or professional development, kind of supplements or supports that need. I kind of prepare myself to give them what they need. Then the college comes, and then of course the supervisor and the colleagues here.

She explained the more motivated learners inspired her to provide more resources and to go into greater detail during lessons. Anika said their motivation encouraged her to better understand their needs. She also said the professional development shaped her as it prepared her to teach the learners. To a lesser degree she was influenced by the college, her supervisors, and colleagues.

Lara suggested responding to learners shaped her the most. Having a new class every semester with new learners, she needed to adjust her instruction to meet the needs of the new group:

I feel like it’s the students because every term it’s a new group that I have to adjust my teaching for. Not just curriculum, but like . . . what's the word I'm thinking. Pace. My pace. The curriculum, the content. That's an every-year thing or every-term thing, so I'm feeling that’s just going to be an ongoing . . . they're always going to influence me first.

She needed to assess the learners and then provide content that met their needs at a comfortable pace. Lara continued to describe the influence of other factors beyond the learners:

I’m guessing the college, unless there’s drastic changes very frequently, is going to be a slow understanding because it’s a need-to-know basis. Like, this is going to be more important. Now I'm getting this. This is under my belt. Let me understand more. And I don’t think that’s going to be changing like my students would be changing every term.
So that’s still going to have an influence, but I feel like it’s going to be the least. The training is somewhere in between. The colleagues are somewhere in between, too, depending on how much I get to see. Consistently seeing people. I haven’t had that yet, so it’s kind of cool to have the same run-ins with the same nights and schedules as other teachers because I can get other perspectives and feedback. Even if it’s an ESL instructor. I thought at first the ESL resources and the ARW resources, like, don’t get caught going over there. Those are theirs. But this last evaluation I was told this whole room, if it’s going to help you, is all up for grabs. Which is good, because sometimes in the room, I needed some of those resources.

Lara saw the college as a less influential part of her experience and assumed she would learn about the college slowly on an as needed basis. Professional development and colleagues were more significant than the college. Lara was looking forward to seeing her peers more regularly so she would have an opportunity to hear their perspectives and get their feedback. At first Lara thought the ESL material in the bookroom was unavailable to her as an ABE/ASE teacher, but she recently learned she could use anything in the bookroom. She was happy to find out all the resources were available to her.

Three participants had a difficult time deciding what influenced them the most, but learners were in the top two. Jeanette stated that learners and peers shaped her experience and practice equally:

I think the greatest influence has probably, it’s kind of a toss-up between students and teachers. Other teachers. I don't want to say it’s 50-50, because that leaves out everybody else, but maybe it’s a 35-35 split. I feel like the students do as well as my colleagues, which is why I feel like I’m successful at what I do, though, because I’m not just relying on one. I’m not just relying on my administrator. I’m not just relying on my students’ feedback. I’m not just relying on my other teachers. I’m not just relying on [MCC] to provide that for me. . . . Like the people that are closest to you, which are my students and my teachers, are the people that I wind up spending the most time with or seeing the most often are the people that I feel like are going to be the most influential on my teaching practice.
Jeanette believed she was equally influenced by learners and peers. She felt their influence led to her success because she relied on more than one factor for support. While she felt shaped by administrators and the college, she felt those with whom she spent the most time, learners and colleagues, were more significant to her teaching practice.

Carrie considered learners and professional development to be the most important:

Well, students are really important. You know, their information and their feedback are kind of neck [and] neck with the professional development. Their feedback, how they’re feeling about class, if they’re not feeling good about class, I’m not going to continue it or I’m not going to have any students to work with. So yeah. Professional development and interaction with the students would probably be second.

The information and feedback from learners were significant to Carrie, as they impacted her lesson development; she wanted to know how learners felt about class.

The learners and the environment as a whole were of influence to Susan. She enjoyed working at Midwestern and felt the adult education program created a relaxed environment. She spoke about the various influences:

Well, probably the fact that it’s a really great environment has been probably my biggest factor. Like I said, I enjoy being there. I feel like it’s a very relaxed environment and I just enjoy my time there, and that’s probably, like, the biggest thing next to working with the students themselves because they bring so much to the class. Then just knowing that I have teachers and supervisors that are there to support me and help me and they are always [responsive], you reach out and they respond to you right away, pretty quickly. It’s just nice, just like having other people that will ask about it. It’s kind of like at the bottom, probably because it doesn’t really influence me a whole lot. They will ask sometimes. I don’t usually get people that say, “Why do you do that?” I have people that say, “It’s sad that teachers have to get another job in order to make ends meet, but they don’t usually say why would you want to work there too and work longer days? They don’t usually say that. They usually don’t say anything or else they think it sounds like a good thing they might want to do.
Susan liked working with the learners and respected what they brought to the program. She felt relaxed and enjoyed teaching at Midwestern. Every time she had reached out, peers and staff had responded quickly.

It was challenging for Jenny to select the factor by which she was most influenced. She started out saying she was most shaped by learners, then quickly suggested the impact of the program vision was a strong influence and clarified the program vision resulted from administrators. Then Jenny added her peer relationships contributed considerably to her positive feelings about her role at Midwestern. Finally, she returned to the strong influence of the learners who kept her coming. Having a difficult time ranking factors by which she had been influenced, Jenny finally said she did not know.

For Kay, it was peer relationships that had the highest value. She described how conversations with colleagues impacted her practice:

Well, I would say the greatest impact is being able to work together on committees here at Midwestern. Right now, I’m on a language arts committee rewriting our common assessments and streamlining our SAFs. And just by meeting with the groups that you work with on a regular basis just helps keep you grounded. It helps you thinking about, “Oh yeah, well, that really does help a student.” You start thinking about, “Well, is it really tied to the standards? Are we really focusing on what we need to focus on the most?” I would say collaborating with peers is the most important. Going to professional development is very helpful, but I don’t find it as beneficial as working close[ly] with your peers. Participating in the pilot for the CCR-SIA was really good, but that’s done now. But the things that we learned about and implemented from that are ongoing. They didn’t just go away because we are not involved in that project any more. We instituted what we learned and we are using it, the lesson planning and making sure that we are covering the standards. Student interaction is really important, but I would say working with peers is the most important.

Meeting regularly with her peers kept Kay grounded and focused on what would really help learners. She spoke with peers about the amount lessons, assignments, and assessments were
aligned to standards and the weight to which this was taking place. Kay shared an appreciation for professional development, but not to the same degree as collaborating with peers. She spoke about the CCR-SIA pilot, commended the project, and added that although it was over in its original form, the learning from the CCR-SIA was being used department wide. She mentioned the significance of learner interaction but reiterated she was most impacted by her peers.

As Kay continued, she spoke about other impacts on her experience and practice:

Well, I would say your individual classrooms would be next after working with peers. Like I said, every class is different. Every class has its own personality, so finding that out and working within that structure every semester. Sometimes you have a really talkative group and sometimes you have a really quiet group. Just being able to meet the students where they are is really important. Then I would say professional development, then maybe dealing with other people within the institution like your supervisors and then the people outside of your department like the library and performing arts.

After peers, learners next influenced Kay the most. Following peers and learners, she was influenced by professional development, supervisors, and finally, others in the college.

According to Bernadette, the administration had the greatest impact. She described the influence of her administrators:

How [any of these influences] shaped me? Well, it definitely has to do with the administration. That’s probably the most important part of an adult ed teacher. Anybody that works in this field, you have to have a supportive administration, approachable administration. I think sticking with the field, you do need the peer support, definitely. That’s probably down there, second maybe. That things are run smoothly because with the copy machines and the union, all that organizational structure is very important because all that was very smooth in my opinion. So that’s also extremely important. And then the students, the fact that the students are pretty well behaved. The fact that we work in a very clean new building. I like that. Those are all really important things for me. I think that this is the longest job I've had, staying at Midwestern Community College. It really is.

Supportive and approachable administrators were of import to Bernadette. Next, she looked to the support of her peers and commented on the smoothness with which things ran and the
organizational structure of the college. Well-behaved learners and the clean building rounded out the factors that influenced Bernadette. The combined impact of those agents influenced her to stay at the college longer than at any other job.

The participants were influenced by many agents, but the learners had the strongest impact on their experience and practice. The next factor of influence was colleagues, as participants spoke highly of their peers and the many ways in which they had been impacted. Administrators and the college were significant to a lesser degree, followed by a number of other factors.

This chapter presented and discussed themes that emerged through participant interviews. Themes identified in the chapter were (1) career journey to adult education, (2) socialization into adult education, and (3) influence of adult education on teaching. The theme career journey to adult education showed that adjunct instructors in adult education found adult education as they looked for part-time teaching jobs in other disciplines, were referred by friends, or were seeking ways to help parents of school-age children.

The theme socialization into adult education showed that participants were most influenced by learners, in particular by watching learners graduate at the formal high school equivalency ceremony. The second most influential agent was colleagues. Participants detailed how working on projects together had encouraged relationship building. The third theme was influence of adult education on teaching perspectives. Participants shared the large degree by which their perspective had grown as their knowledge about adult education learners increased. Additionally, instructional initiatives were seen with such relevancy that participants also holding community college and K-12 positions were using the information in both settings.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

This chapter presents an overview of the study followed by discussion of the research questions. Implications, conclusion, and recommendations for future research sections complete the chapter.

Summary

This qualitative case study explored the experiences of part-time adjunct faculty teaching in an adult education program at a community college. Specifically, the study looked at how adjunct faculty in one department described their career journeys to being adult educators, their socialization experience, and how teaching adult education influenced their perspective on teaching. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 participants who self-identified as having at least two years of experience as adjunct instructors in the adult education program at Midwestern Community College. The three questions guiding the study were:

1. How do teachers describe their career journey to being adult educators?
2. How do teachers describe their socialization into adult education?
3. How do teachers describe how teaching adult education has influenced their perspective on teaching?

To summarize the findings, when asked about the purpose of adult education, participants spoke of learners earning the high school equivalency or GED as the most well-known purpose. However, participants noted that their learners each had specific goals in mind when entering the program. For example, Carrie spoke of learners finding new ways to relate to their children
based on adult education classroom practices. She shared a story wherein one of her learners was excited to discuss a book being read by the class with her middle schooler. Since both were reading the same book, they had discussions at home about the journeys and life decisions that happened in the text, thus furthering family relationships.

The participants described finding adult education teaching positions by accident while seeking adjunct teaching positions in related disciplines at the community college. Jeanette detailed looking for a part-time teaching position that would allow her to spend most of the day at home with her young child. She described first looking for positions teaching college-level English, before finding the posting for an adult education reading and writing instructor. Since all of the participants were seeking part-time work, they spoke of it as generally positive, but one challenge that several participants mentioned was the difficulty in scheduling mutually convenient times to collaborate with colleagues. Due to the flexibility of the adjunct schedule, participants described it as working well with their individual schedules but reported that finding times that a group of peers could meet was challenging because of the various times they were teaching. The participants described themselves as being rather open minded, but were still surprised by the reasons, beyond high school expulsion, for learners to be in the adult education program. According to participants, they were personally impacted by the learners’ life stories. The participants also reported surprise at adult education learners’ attendance patterns. While participants understood learners had responsibilities outside of the classroom, they spoke of being surprised by how often learners missed class.

The participants stated that learners had the most significant influence on their socialization experience. The participants reported being most rewarded by learner accomplishments and gratitude. In particular, seeing learners go through the annual graduation
ceremony brought participants tears of joy. The greatest challenge described by participants was the learners’ inconsistent attendance. According to participants, colleagues were the next most significant influence on participants. The participants spoke positively of their peers. Several of the participants referred to their peers as friends. These relationships developed over time as they developed lesson plans, conference presentations, curricula, and assessments together, according to participants. The one full-time faculty member in the department was described positively and as a mentor by participants. The participants also reported being positively influenced by college administrators. They expressed appreciation for the availability of instructional resources and the meaningful feedback given through the classroom observation process. The participants also reported valuing the open communication style of administrators, leading participants to feel heard in conversations.

The participants described ways in which adult education had influenced their perspective on teaching. The participants spoke of empathy, instructional differentiation, and resources they provided to learners as immigration issues, domestic violence, and special needs were disclosed. The participants reflected on the importance of connecting with learners and wanting them to feel included. Adult education instructional initiatives were described by participants as having influenced both the instructional practices of participants as well as their relationships with peers. Additionally, these instructional practices were valued to the extent participants spoke of using them, not only in their adult education teaching positions, but their K-12 and community college teaching positions as well.

Overwhelmingly, participants described learners as having the greatest influence on their adult education socialization experience. This concurs with findings in the literature (Lortie, 1975; Richardson & Placier, 2001; Staton & Hunt, 1992; Zeichner & Gore, 1989).
Discussion of Research Questions

The nine face-to-face interviews and one interview via phone were conducted from a 44-question interview guide and guided by the three research questions. Themes emerged from several rounds of coding. The answers to the three research questions that guided the study follow, along with a discussion of the themes.

Research Question 1
How do teachers describe their career journey to being adult educators?

Four themes emerged as the participants described their career journey to being adult educators: (1) falling into adult education by accident: finding the career journey, (2) getting into the groove: prepared on the career journey, (3) coming and going: adjuncting on the career journey, and (4) if only I’d known: surprised on the career journey.

Falling into Adult Education by Accident: Finding the Career Journey

All 10 participants described landing in teaching adult education by accident in that not one of them was actively seeking a teaching position in adult basic and secondary education when they stumbled onto the job posting. As mothers of young children, some participants described seeking part-time positions in which they could have a professional job but only work a portion of the day, spending most of the day at home with their children. One participant was looking for a part-time teaching position post retirement, while others were looking to complement other full-time or part-time jobs.

According to participants, they were looking to teach content with which they had experience when they found adult education openings at the college. Of those whose experience was as K-12 teachers, some were avoiding being a paraprofessional, while two were actively
seeking to teach older learners. This desire by 20% of participants to work with older learners parallels Smith and Hofer (2003), who found 19% of their respondents wished to work with adults as their reason for teaching adult education. Two participants wanted a way to reach parents of school-age children they knew were struggling. Some participants were encouraged to apply by friends and co-workers at their other jobs who were Midwestern employees, while others perused the college openings hoping for something of interest.

Getting into the Groove: Prepared on the Career Journey

Few programs are available that train adult educators (Smith & Gomez, 2011; Smith & Hofer, 2003) and no nationally recognized adult education teaching certificate exists (Perin, 1999; Smith & Gomez, 2011), so the adult education division at Midwestern requires at least a bachelor’s degree and one year of teaching experience to be hired, followed by adult education-specific training once faculty are hired. Nationally, about 50% of community college adjuncts hold master’s degrees (Leslie & Gappa, 2002) and a similar percent in adult education in particular (Smith & Hofer, 2003). However, 90% of participants in this study held at least a master’s degree. One participant out of the 10 held a doctorate, which is on par with the national average of community college adjuncts (Leslie & Gappa, 2002). Education was a second career in the case of four participants.

Seven of 10 participants had taught in adult education at Midwestern for five or more years, more than the 50% noted by Leslie and Gappa (2002), leading to their statement referring to adjunct faculty in community colleges as “stable professionals with substantial experience and commitment to their work” (p. 62). These participant data also concur with study results finding 88% of adult educators were happy in their career choice (Sabatini et al., 2000) but contrast with
Smith and Hofer's (2003) results indicating a large portion of adult educators do not stay long in the field. All 10 participants had teaching experience before being hired into adult education. Eight participants’ experience was through the K-12 system and two participants had experience at the community college level teaching transfer or developmental-level coursework.

After their hire, the participants engaged in adult education professional development (Smith & Gomez, 2011; Smith & Hofer, 2003) to prepare for the start of classes and meet the state requirement. The participants shared many experiences and items that helped them become acclimated to the adult education classroom. Faculty were given an orientation before the start of class. The participants described appreciating the orientation, but its completeness depended on how close to the beginning of the semester the faculty was hired. They were also offered the chance to observe adult education instructors assigned similar classes. The opportunity to observe peers gave the participants a window into more seasoned instructors’ practice and classroom environments. The participants were exposed to successful adult education models, giving them a chance to see how the setting was similar to or different from other educational settings with which they were familiar. Similar to findings in other studies regarding the role of peers (Vezne & Gunbayi, 2016), participants reported that conversations with colleagues also played a critical role in learning about adult education learners and how others structured their classrooms and lessons. The participants also referred to material resources they were given, such as binders of adult education content standards and curricula as well as a book about adult motivation and effective teaching methods. Experience and ongoing professional development were described by participants as essential factors as they moved forward. The participants described later semesters looking different than earlier ones as they gained experience and expanded from teaching straight content to integrating learner goals. This finding is in agreement
with other researchers (Bullough, 1993; Macdonald, 1999) who found the issues teachers faced became more complex over time, starting in early career with curriculum concerns, and as the career progressed, attention moved to individual student motivation.

**Coming and Going: Adjuncting on the Career Journey**

The participants were raising children, had full-time or other part-time jobs, or wanted to enjoy the benefits of retirement, but what all of them spoke of in common was looking for a part-time teaching position. This overwhelming desire for part-time work parallels research stating a large portion of adjuncts are employed full-time elsewhere or not looking for full-time teaching at the college (Leslie & Gappa, 2002); however, it is in stark contrast to Smith and Hofer (2003), who found just 18% of adult educators cited wanting part-time work as a reason for joining the field. The participants overwhelmingly described looking for a part-time teaching position that would fit with other aspects of their lives, and being an adjunct allowed the flexibility to schedule around these commitments and change one’s teaching schedule each semester if necessary. The participants spoke of the flexibility to adjunct around other jobs as well as family commitments. According to Leslie and Gappa (2002), nationally, the gender ratio of part-time faculty is equally balanced between men and women; however, the ratio in this study was 9:1, as 90% of the participants were women. It is not clear why this ratio is so different than that reported by Leslie and Gappa.

While flexibility was an important factor in the attractiveness of adjunct faculty work, the flexibility also presented some downsides. The participants described the difficulty in collaborating with colleagues who taught at times different from their own. The variety of class times also created challenges for scheduling committee meetings and groups collaborating to
revise curriculum, assessments, or other initiatives. Faculty roundtables used to discuss methods, policies, or other items of interest to instructors were often run at four different times to accommodate most instructors. These times coincided with the most common times faculty held office hours, consistent with the recommendation of Sabatini et al. (2000) to conduct professional development during teachers’ paid work hours. However, that plan meant rarely having everyone together to discuss a topic. At odds with Jolley et al. (2014), the faculty workroom was described by participants as a positive environment in which instructors spoke with each other before and after class. The workroom had large tables, computers, printers, a copy machine, and a variety of supplies for use by teachers, so most participants planned lessons, collaborated, and celebrated personal milestones with colleagues in the workroom.

If Only I’d Known: Surprised on the Career Journey

The participants reported being surprised by numerous items, but they spoke most about the impact learners had on them, the number of reasons learners were in the program, and the attendance patterns of adult basic and secondary education learners. The participants described already being very open-minded and compassionate individuals, but they shared their surprise of how much the learners’ experiences impacted their feelings as they heard the learners’ stories regarding their educational journeys and lives in general. The participants reported gaining a wider understanding of the many reasons learners are seeking a high school equivalency beyond the stereotypical learner who is asked to leave high school. Learners also may not complete high school due to illness (their own or others), bullying, homelessness, depression, anxiety, special learning needs, or language barriers, which is similar to information from Martin and Fisher's (1989) study that indicated learners leave high school for both social and personal reasons. It is
likely that participant data also concur with the results of a 2012 national survey of learners who left school before ninth grade, indicating 74% of respondents cited getting behind on schoolwork or poor grades as the reason for leaving school (McFarland et al., 2016). Many of the reasons learners shared with participants for leaving school could have resulted in getting behind on school work and receiving poor grades. The participants’ anecdotal comments also are in agreement with the survey results indicating 26% of respondents left due to school suspension or expulsion (McFarland et al., 2016). Additionally, according to some participants, they were surprised by the experience of learners who had never been to school or had only completed middle school in their home country.

Another surprise according to the participants, revolved around learner attendance. The learners had responsibilities outside of the classroom, and while that itself was not a surprise to participants, the inconsistent attendance patterns to which those responsibilities led was described by participants as a surprise. Many learners missed class regularly due to childcare, transportation, employment, and legal issues. These reasons mirrored the findings of Styles (2011).

**Research Question 2**

How do teachers describe their socialization into adult education?

Three themes emerged as the participants described their socialization into adult education: (1) Penrose Triangle: socialization through learners, (2) friendship, collaboration, and inclusivity: socialization through colleagues, and (3) treated like a professional: socialization through college and division.
Penrose Triangle: Socialization through Learners

The Penrose Triangle: Socialization through Learners theme developed as the participants described rewards and challenges of working in adult education. Bernadette explained that the Penrose Triangle is a sculpture of an impossible triangle in Perth, Australia. From one angle the triangle appears to be a closed triangle, but from another angle, one sees that it is not complete. When describing rewards and challenges, the participants spoke about learners in adult education and how each one is unique. The variety of situations from which learners came to adult education and the continuum of needs presented, made learner success that much richer. When asked about the greatest influence on participants, the most common answer from participants related to the high school equivalency graduation ceremony. This ceremony is held once a year and is modeled after the college graduation ceremony with all the same pomp and circumstance. The graduation ceremony is a formal opportunity for recipients of a high school equivalency credential to celebrate their accomplishment with family and friends (Office of Vocational and Adult Education, 1988). Bernadette and Kay mentioned literally shedding tears due to the emotion of the ceremony. The participants stated that gratitude from learners influenced them, as did “Aha!” moments when learners grasped challenging material or understood its relevance to real life. Positive recognition from learners and the reward of making a difference in the life of a learner were also found in other studies to be influential to faculty (Huang, 2011).

While the rewards far outweighed the challenges, the participants noted that challenges emerged. The largest challenge according to participants, was also one of the items about which participants were surprised, discussed earlier: inconsistent attendance patterns. While many learners will attend class regularly, some will not. Learners miss class due to childcare,
transportation, employment, legal, and other real-life situations according to participants. Other studies had similar findings, indicating the complex lives of adult learners limited the amount of time they spent in class (National Research Council, 2012b).

**Friendship, Collaboration, and Inclusivity: Socialization through Colleagues**

The participants spoke highly of their peers, which is in agreement with other research supporting colleagues as valued agents of socialization (Staton & Hunt, 1992; Vezne & Gunbayi, 2016). The findings included numerous examples of faculty relationships extending to friendships due to the high levels of support and collaboration that happened within the group. According to participants, this support evolved through collaboration on lesson plans, conference and other professional development session attendance, and aligning content standards, along with creating and revising curricula and assessments. The positive influence of professional peer collaboration is supported in the literature (Macdonald, 1999; Vezne & Gunbayi, 2016).

Participants also described assistance among faculty, such as willingness to substitute teach for others and more personal support during illness. The participants spoke of being highly supported by their adjunct colleagues as well as by the full-time faculty member in the department who was described as flexible, inclusive, and encouraging. This finding is similar to other research linking the support of the full-time faculty member, perceived as a mentor or role model, with the self-perception and professional commitment of faculty members (Lengeling et al., 2017).
Treated like a Professional: Socialization through College and Division

In the findings for Treated like a Professional: Socialization through College and Division, participants described being well respected by the administrators in the Adult Basic and Secondary Education Department, Adult Education Division, and the college. According to participants, the words and actions of the administration resulted in them feeling like professionals. These findings are supported by literature indicating faculty receiving institutional support have strong professional identities and a sense of belonging in the profession (Lengeling et al., 2017).

The participants reported that the meaningful feedback received during classroom observations as well as the breadth of texts, materials, and other instructional resources available for faculty use was appreciated. The message of respect and value from supervisors was also conveyed by the open conversation and transfer of information regarding division policies, goals, and professional development according to participants. Additionally, participants reported a positive influence when nominated for teaching awards and felt heard in conversations with the administration. This supports other literature indicating feelings of fulfillment by part-time adjuncts as long as their job performance was recognized (Ott & Dippold, 2018).

Research Question 3

How do teachers describe how teaching adult education has influenced their perspective on teaching?

The themes that emerged as the participants described the influence of adult education on their teaching perspective include (1) wisdom from our learners: gaining an inclusive perspective, (2) initiatives in adult education: gaining an instructional perspective, and (3) driving force: gaining a big-picture perspective.
Wisdom from Our Learners: Gaining an Inclusive Perspective

In the findings for Wisdom from Our Learners: Gaining an Inclusive Perspective, most participants described themselves to be open-minded, but since teaching adult education their perspectives have grown. The participants shared how the learners introduced them to many reasons for attending a high school equivalency program. The faculty spoke of learners who left school due to family illness, depression, bullying, special learning needs, and expulsion. They had learners whose educational experience in their home country ranged from no formal school experience to completing a high school diploma but desiring U.S. credentials. The participants described learners facing immigration issues and domestic violence. According to participants, they made themselves open and available to assist learners by providing instructional differentiation, empathy, and resources. This type of assistance is supported by research detailing the significance of faculty caring about learners, content, and teaching and learning as well as interacting well with the learners (Fink, 2013). The participants spoke of connecting with the learners on their journey, which is a reflection of the relationship participants had with their learners. This finding concurs with Hamachek (1999), who contends being self-aware and conscious of the perceptions of others is critical. He concluded, “Consciously, we teach what we know; unconsciously, we teach who we are” (p. 209).

Initiatives in Adult Education: Gaining an Instructional Perspective

Another theme that emerged as participants described the influence of adult education on their teaching perspective was Initiatives in Adult Education: Gaining an Instructional Perspective. The participants described being invited to take part in numerous adult education projects that have improved the instructional practice of adult educators over the years. Some of
the projects were national pilots like College and Career Readiness: Standards-in-Action, while others like Student Achievement in Reading were state level. The participants spoke of the pilots leading to additional projects like content standards, curriculum, and assessment revision. This finding agrees with Ambrose et al. (2010) and Korthagen (2004), who suggest teaching is both complex and contextualized, requiring continuous adaption.

According to participants, the projects also impacted their connections with other faculty. The participants spoke about the work trips they went on for training and how those experiences encouraged faculty relationships to grow through the amount of time spent together and the common goals toward which they worked. The faculty described how the projects often reminded them how it felt to be a learner as they encountered new and rigorous concepts. This finding of teacher as learner concurs with research conveying the positive influence of lifelong learning (Rossetti, 2002). The high instructional value these initiatives provided also led those who taught in settings in addition to adult education to use the information and practices in their K-12 and community college teaching positions as well according to participants.

Driving Force: Gaining a Big-Picture Perspective

Another theme that emerged as participants described the influence of adult education on their teaching perspective was Driving Force: Gaining a Big Picture Perspective in that the participants were shaped by a variety of influences, but overwhelmingly learners were the factor by which participants described being the most influenced. This is in agreement with other studies that noted the identification of learners as the primary agent of socialization (Lortie, 1975; Richardson & Placier, 2001; Staton & Hunt, 1992; Zeichner & Gore, 1989). Participants stated they could make a difference in the lives of learners and were rewarded when their
learners were successful. The participants also described being influenced by colleagues, a finding supported by Vezne and Gunbayi (2016). The participants explained that they shared materials, collaborated on numerous projects, planned lessons together, and provided personal support for each other. Many of the participants described their Midwestern colleagues as friends. The participants stated administrators were also an influence. According to participants, they appreciated the vision provided by administrators as well as their open communication with instructors. Ariel described the administrators as “setting the beat” for the division. Lengeling et al. (2017) also found supportive administration positively influenced faculty and their feelings regarding the teaching profession.

Implications and Recommendations

The findings from this study have implications for college faculty as well as college administrators and policy makers.

The participants reported that learners had the greatest influence on them. While this study did not address learners beyond their level of influence on the participants, the findings indicate the high school equivalency graduation ceremony has a high positive impact on the faculty. The administrators and policy makers will want to ensure graduation ceremonies for this population continue. If no ceremony exists, a formal graduation ceremony for the institution’s high school equivalency completers should be created separate from other college graduation ceremonies.

According to participants, the full-time faculty member’s positive attitude toward adjunct peers in the department influenced their feeling of value. Full-time faculty members will want to consider themselves the tone setters in their department, recognize the teaching strengths their
part-time peers bring to the profession, and support these peers as integral members of the department.

The feeling of value held by the adjunct faculty members in part evolved through the respectful treatment they received from the division administrators in the department according to participants. It is relevant for division administrators to consider adjunct faculty as integral members of the division. An orientation should be provided to new faculty as well as opportunities for new faculty to observe and collaborate with current faculty of a similar discipline. Adjunct faculty members should be communicated with regularly to ensure they have accurate and timely information regarding policies, goals, professional development, and other opportunities for involvement. Classroom observations should take place with the goal of instructional improvement through meaningful feedback. Participation in national, state, and local initiatives should be considered for the positive influence they will have on division or department practices as well as the impact they will have on faculty’s instructional practices and relationships. Consistent times for professional development and collaboration should be considered. This can assist adjuncts in working together on projects and lesson planning.

Division administrators had all been faculty members before becoming administrators and many had even been adjunct faculty members at this institution. Participants indicated that knowing administrators understood their experience lead to an increased level of mutual respect. A practice of administrators, full-time faculty members, and adjunct faculty members collaborating lays a valuable foundation.
Conclusion

The focus of this qualitative case study was on the socialization experience of adjunct faculty teaching adult basic and secondary education classes in an adult education department in a Midwestern community college (see Figure 4). The findings indicated that these faculty members described finding adult education by accident as they were seeking part-time teaching positions. They stated orientation, peer observations, and methodology and curriculum guides were helpful as they adjusted to teaching in adult education. The participants noted that while they were most surprised by the variety of reasons learners needed adult education and the inconsistent attendance patterns of the learners, they were most influenced by seeing learners walk across the stage at the high school equivalency graduation ceremony and other learner successes. The participants also reported being influenced by their colleagues. The participants describe being impacted by the support, collaboration, and inclusion by adjunct peers and full-time faculty and valued by the respect received from administrators and by being treated on par with other college faculty. Teaching in adult education led faculty to have a greater perspective of learners’ situations and a wide range of instructional strengths gained from national and state initiatives according to participants. The findings concur with Lengeling et al. (2017), who stated the socialization process influenced teachers and the formation of their identity.

Even though responses are typically more negative from adjunct faculty, in this study participants described their experiences in more positive terms. The framework for the study was Lawson's model of socialization which includes three stages of socialization: acculturation and recruitment, professional education, and organizational socialization (1983a, 1983b). In particular, the study’s focus was organizational socialization, which takes place when individuals
Figure 4. Model of adjunct faculty socialization.
enter the workforce (Lawson, 1983a). Van Maanen and Schein (1979, p. 3) define organizational socialization as learning the social knowledge, beliefs, perspectives, norms, and skills, or learning “the ropes” of the organization. The participants’ socialization led them to have a positive experience, and a model of adjunct faculty socialization was then developed based on that experience. The model of adjunct faculty socialization shows that a variety of factors work together to influence the experience of adjunct faculty (see Figure 4).

Participants reported many factors by which they were influenced. Consistent with Lawson's (1983b, 1983a) model of socialization, some of the influences took place before the part-time faculty members were hired, as in the case of participants who were encouraged by employees of Midwestern to apply, telling them MCC was a great place to work. These factors, along with how participants discovered and began adjuncting in adult education, are represented by “Other influences on adjunct faculty socialization” on the model.

According to Huang (2011), factors of organizational socialization can be divided into organizational culture and people. A number of factors have impacted the organizational culture at Midwestern Community College. Due to the confluence of fiscal decision making, securing of grants, and other financial considerations, there is a general feeling of being well resourced at Midwestern. At the college as a whole, new initiatives are encouraged and celebrated. College staff and faculty are regularly nominated for national, state, and local awards. Additionally, the full-time and part-time faculty are members of the same union, encouraging collegial relationships; as part of the faculty union, adjuncts reap advantages associated with salary, course assignments, and other benefits. These factors are represented by “Organizational Culture” on the model.
As for the people who had an influence, according to participants, learners played the greatest role in participant socialization. The participants reported that as they heard their learners’ stories, participants’ perspectives became more inclusive as they became more empathic toward learners and their situations. As learners experienced success and expressed gratitude toward faculty, participants explained how that reward influenced faculty retention because they wanted to continue teaching in the program. This factor is represented by “Learners” on the model.

According to participants, it was their colleagues who next influenced their socialization experience. By extending guidance to instructors as they were hired, new adjuncts were brought into the fold. The participants reported developing their relationships with other faculty members by collaborating on lesson plans, curricula, assessments, presentations, and other projects. The participants described how these and other professional development initiatives provided adjuncts with the opportunity to create connections with one another, leading to feelings of inclusion that in many cases developed into friendships. The faculty-peer relationships are represented by “Colleagues” on the model and the professional development initiatives are represented by “Instructional Initiatives.”

Finally, participants reported that by respecting and valuing the part-time faculty, administrators influenced participants. According to participants, administrators used open communication in which participants felt heard, disseminated information, nominated faculty for awards, provided helpful onboarding material and experiences, and conducted meaningful classroom visitations. Participants reported that through these actions, they felt administrators were treating them like professionals. This is one factor about which participants regularly commented that their experience at MCC was different from other environments in which they
had worked. The participants asserted they had rarely received this level of respect and inclusion. This factor is represented by “Administrators” on the model.

By identifying and recognizing the influences these factors have on organizational socialization as reported by the participants, other colleges can use these promising practices to support experienced adjunct faculty and assist in the socialization of new adjunct faculty to the organization (Macdonald, 1999; Pike & Fletcher, 2014; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Understanding the agents of socialization will increase the likelihood of satisfaction and retention of adjunct faculty members, a goal of institutions of higher education (Wyles, 1998).

Future Research

The completion of this study has led to questions for future research. The research site has one full-time faculty member who respects her adjunct peers and is well respected by them. Future research focusing on the beliefs and experiences of full-time and part-time faculty members would provide a greater understanding of their relationship and the role full-time faculty play in settings employing both faculty statuses.

Division administration at the research site has a collaborative open-door leadership style. Future research focusing on the relationship between leadership style and faculty connectedness would provide a greater understanding of the development of these concepts.

Faculty in this study described how participating in the many initiatives and projects helped develop their cohesive relationships with each other. Future research could be done with a larger pool of adjuncts to explore their experiences.

Participants overwhelmingly wanted to teach part-time due to the flexibility of the position. When one considers the high proportion of female to male participants, future research
is suggested to explore the experiences of male and female adjuncts, focusing on the experiences by gender and the influence of flexibility on part-time work.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

CALL FOR PARTICIPATION
Call for Participation

Hello ABE/ASE faculty members,

I am a graduate student in the Adult and Higher Education program at Northern Illinois University and am seeking your participation in my dissertation research. The working title of my dissertation is *A Case Study in Teacher Socialization*. The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of teachers.

Participants of this study will be asked to take part in two 45- to 90-minute interviews at a site convenient to the participant and provide an artifact that illustrates their perception of their socialization process. The interview questions will center on the experiences of adult basic and secondary education (ABE/ASE) teachers and will allow teachers to share their experience of socialization into adult education teaching at a community college. The focus will be on adjunct faculty teaching ABE/ASE classes in an adult education setting in a Midwestern community college. Participant identities as well as the research site identity will be kept confidential.

If you have been teaching part-time in the ABE/ASE department for at least 2 years, I would like to request your participation in my study. You will be compensated for your time with a $5.00 Starbucks gift card immediately following each of your two interviews. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary and participants can withdraw at any time.

Please email me at ehobson@niu.edu (or hit reply) if you would like to participate or have any questions about the study.

Thank you,

Elizabeth

Elizabeth Hobson
Doctoral Candidate, Adult and Higher Education
Northern Illinois University
APPENDIX B
CONSENT FORM
Consent Form

I agree to participate in the research project titled *A Case Study in Teacher Socialization* being conducted by Elizabeth Hobson, a graduate student at Northern Illinois University. I have been informed that the purpose of the study is to explore the experiences of teachers.

I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I will be asked to take part in two 45- to 90-minute interviews and provide an artifact that that illustrates my perception of the socialization process of adult education teachers at a community college. The interview questions will center on the experiences of adult basic and secondary education (ABE/ASE) teachers and will allow me to share my experience of socialization into adult education teaching at a community college.

I am aware that my participation is voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time without penalty or prejudice, and that if I have any additional questions concerning this study, I may contact Elizabeth Hobson (ehobson@niu.edu) or Dr. LaVerne Gyant, supervising faculty member (lgyant@niu.edu). I understand that if I wish further information regarding my rights as a research subject, I may contact the Office of Research Compliance at Northern Illinois University at (815) 753-8588.

I understand that the intended benefits of this study include contributing to the research in socialization and professional development for teachers in adult education programs. Potential personal benefits to participants would include having an opportunity to reflect on their teaching practices, socialization experiences, and the role they see themselves in as a teacher.

I have been informed that there are no reasonably foreseeable risks associated with this study. I understand that all information gathered during this research will be kept confidential. Pseudonyms will be given to each participant and the research site to protect their identity. During interview transcription, the pseudonyms will be used to further protect the subjects and data. A master list of the pseudonyms will be kept in a secure location at the researcher’s home. Signed copies of the consent forms will be stored in a separate secure location at the researcher’s home. The records will be stored on a password-protected computer. Three years following completion of the study all records will be destroyed.

I understand that my consent to participate in this project does not constitute a waiver of any legal rights or redress I might have a result of my participation, and I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent form.

______________________________________  __________________________
Signature of Participant      Date

I understand this research is being audio recorded and I give my permission for my participation in the interview to be audio recorded.

__________________________________________  _____________________________
Signature of Participant      Date
APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
Research Questions

The following research questions are guiding this qualitative case study:

RQ1: How do teachers describe their career journey to being adult educators?

RQ2: How do teachers describe their socialization into adult education?

RQ3: How do teachers describe how teaching adult education has influenced their perspective on teaching?

Interview Guide I

Introduction of participant I am going to start by asking you for some general information.

1. Please provide your name.

2. Tell me how long you have been teaching in this adult education program and the course(s) you are currently teaching or most often teach here.

3. Tell me about your educational background (degree[s], teaching certificate[s], teaching experience, etc.).

4. What kind of preparation and experiences have you had specific to adult education?

Personal school experience Now I would like to learn a little about your personal experience in school.

5. Growing up, tell me about your experiences in school. What were some of your favorite and least favorite experiences in school?

6. Tell me about a favorite lesson, activity, or project you did at any point during your educational experience or career.

7. Share some stories about your most favorite teacher.

8. Share some stories about your least favorite teacher.
9. How did these experiences influence your desire to become a teacher?

**Classroom experience** *Now I would like to learn about your experience as a teacher in the adult education classroom.*

10. Talk about the program and environment in which you teach. What is it like to teach here?

11. Please tell me about the student population represented in your class(es). Including…
   
   - Academic descriptors and range (grade level equivalent and descriptive example)
   - Cultural/ethnic diversity
   - Age range (estimated)
   - Gender distribution
   - Other factors (employment, raising children, legal issues, etc.)

12. How do you see your relationship with students? Tell a story that provides an example.

13. Tell me a story that illustrates a typical day in your adult education class.

14. What is your favorite thing about teaching in adult education?

15. What is your least favorite thing/greatest challenge to teaching in adult education?

**What you brought** *Think about your journey to teaching in adult education. I would like to hear your thoughts about why you became an adult education teacher.*

16. Tell me about what influenced you to become a teacher in general.

17. What led you to become a teacher in adult education in particular?
   
   - What about you, makes a career in adult education a good fit?
• What aspects of teaching in adult education influenced your decision to take the job/stay in the field?

18. What has been your motivation or satisfaction for staying in adult education?

19. Thinking about yourself, finish the metaphor… An adult education teacher is like a … because…

Interview Guide II

I would like to start the second interview by reminding you a little about our first interview. You shared …

What you got. Next, I would like you to think about your experiences in adult education here at the community college.

20. In your opinion, what are the purposes and goals of adult education? Has your opinion changed since you began teaching here? In what way?

21. Describe how you were prepared to work in this position.

22. Share some examples of how your students influenced your teaching experience and practice.

23. Tell me about the influence your colleagues have had on your teaching experience and practice.

24. What influence have your supervisors had on your teaching experience and practice?

25. Tell me about the role the community college has played in your teaching experience and practice.
26. How have other people, organizations, or concepts influenced your experience and practice?

27. What was the most helpful advice you received? From whom did you receive it?

28. What was the least helpful advice you received? From whom did you receive it?

What you need. These next questions relate to your needs as a teacher.

29. Tell me about how you as a teacher learn? What? Where?

30. Tell about professional learning experiences (explicit or implicit) that have been meaningful. Why?

31. Tell about professional learning experiences (explicit or implicit) that were not meaningful. Why not?

32. Please describe a teaching practice that you integrated into your classroom wherein you felt exceptionally proud of yourself and students were highly engaged. What happened and how did it make you feel?

33. Think about a time you attended a professional development session where the ideas, strategies, or methods did not align with your beliefs. How did you respond?

34. Share with me some surprising moments or incidents which significantly changed your previous beliefs.

35. What do you wish you had known before you started teaching in adult education?

36. What do you need in order to do your job well?

37. What supports you in doing the best job possible? What hinders you?

Where you are now. Thinking about your present situation teaching adult learners.
38. Socialization is reciprocal—how do you feel you have influenced your students, colleagues, supervisor, or the institution?

39. Who are you as a learner? A classroom teacher? A member of the community college adult education program? A member of the adult education field?

40. Tell about professional development you would desire. Why?

41. Tell about any divisional practices or resources that you would like to see implemented.

42. How do you most often seek to improve your teaching abilities?

43. Without being humble, what are your best qualities, skills, and values as a teacher?

*To conclude...*

44. Is there anything else you would like to share about your socialization experience? Your experience as an adult education teacher?